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M. G. McClelland

A NAMELESS NOVEL

By M. G. McClelland

AUTHOR OF "OBLIVION," "PRINCESS," "BURKETT'S LOCK," "ELEANOR GWYNN, ETC. ETC.

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BY

M. G. McCLELLAND

AUTHOR OF "OBLIVION," "PRINCESS," "BURKETT'S LOCK," "ELEANOR GWYNN," ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MOUNTAIN MIRAGE.

The mystical day in February had passed; the ground-hog had come out, cast a weather eye aloft and around, humped his gray back, and retired to his hole for another six weeks. After that for eight days it rained ceaselessly, and with scant variation. The water fell straight, from low clouds, or hurried before the wind in long swaths, which seemed to pile on one another, give way in the lower strata, and tumble down the mountain-side with tumult. The pines held their heads high, making believe not to mind; but the leafless branches of oak, hickory, hemlock and ash, destitute of aught wherewith to hide their nakedness, bent and shivered unreservedly. When the rain held up for an hour together, mist gathered in the ravines, rolled upward and blanketed the summit of Tuckahoe Mountain. Among the fastnesses every surcharged spring brimmed its basin and flung its overplus downward; the rivulets and streams were swollen to torrents, and in the valleys the floods were out.

This for seven days, and on the eighth, between sun-up and mid-day, the weather lifted.

At eleven o'clock Wolfe Ranke came out of his cabin and looked about him. He was a small man, nearing middle life, but muscular and wiry as a wild-cat. His black hair curled closely, and his complexion was swarthy, but his eyes were a curious light steely blue, and looked out from under penthouse brows with the fixety of gaze peculiar to denizens of solitudes. Their expression seldom varied, except when cunning flitted, bat-wise, across them, or anger caused the pupils to contract and scintillate, like flames licking through dead wood. He was a somber man, seldom moved to mirth, which was held to be a blessing by nervous folks, for the sound of his laughter was arid, and his lips curled back from his teeth curiously, disclosing gums of singular aspect, not healthily red, as is seemly in gums, but purplish blue, like a bruise before it begins to turn green and yellow. Ranke's mirth was so unlovely that it was never rashly provoked.

"It p'intly do give me the all-overs to see Ranke grin with them p'isen blue gums o' his'n," Toby Blake, the blacksmith, complained. "I can't git shet o' ther notion thet he mout take an idee to bite some o' we-all some day."

"He ain't never done nothin' hos*tile* yit," observed the store-keeper on whose premises the criticism was made. "An' he've lived over yonder on Tuckahoe risin' fifteen ye'r. He come to this kentry fust in bush-whackin' day 'long o' his dad, an' arter Seces-

sion bu'st up he come back by hisse'f an' bought lan' an' settled. He ain't never bit nobody, as I've hearn tell, nor offered to bite none."

The store-keeper was a politic man and never allowed a paying customer to be run down in his presence.

Toby laughed. "'Tain't nobody made him bitin' mad yit," he explained. "An' 'tain't nobody liable to, n'other. 'Blue-gums' air danger'us critters to handle, an' folks handles 'em keerful. I'd as leif ram my naked fist out to a rattlesnake as sass a 'blue-gum.'"

He glanced around convincingly, and one or two of the other store loungers nodded. The superstition as to the virulence of the bite of a person with gums discolored as Ranke's were was as firmly rooted as pines in the bucolic mind. Half the men in the store had authentic and variously substantiated narratives to relate of "blue gums" who had bitten people in anger, and in every case the victim was described as perishing therefrom in hideous agony.

"But I 'lowed the p'isenous sort o' 'blue-gums' was niggers," objected a bystander, who was suspected among his fellows of iconoclastic proclivities, and was therefore unpopular.

Toby Blake answered shortly: "Thar ain't but *one* sort o' 'blue-gum,' as ever *I* hearn on, an' thet is the p'isenous sort. As to nigger blood, thet's n'other here nor thar. A sight mo' folks hev got a black drop, nigh by, or fur off, 'en is gin'ally had it fastened on 'em. I ain't namin' no names an' I ain't makin' no ackerzations—only gums is gums, an' *I*

ain't never see'd no right full-blooded white man whar could show a mouf persizely like Ranke's."

"He have got a high nose, howsumever, an' eyes like faded blue caliker," objected the iconoclast stoutly. "You can't prove no black drop on Ranke that'n way."

"I ain't gwine to try," Blake declared. "I ain't gwine to set up no cross-firin' with a 'blue-gum' 'bout nothin'. Folks whar's so high-larnt," with a withering glance, "thet they can't kornsent to believe in nothin', kin talk any sort o' truck they gits ready. All ther word I've got to say is thet 'blue-gums' air damned danger'us."

In which opinion the neighborhood fully sustained him.

As for Ranke, he seemed unconscious of his power, or indifferent to what might be made of it. He was guilty of no effort to terrorize the district, or play the part of a despot; he even refrained from scaring the women and children. Perhaps his moderation was due to lack of ambition, or indifference to notoriety, or perhaps he divined that canine demonstrations would speedily be put down with a shot-gun. Whatever his motive, certain it is that, for years, he lived as peaceable a life as though his gums were of the legitimate color.

He was unmarried, no hill maiden having yet evinced sufficient courage and devotion to rise above the superstitious terror his mouth inspired, or overget the aversion engendered by the taint of blood accredited him. Ranke appeared to bear up under the loneliness of his lot astonishingly, however, and

went and came among the people little, or much, according to his liking.

Standing in his door-yard, he looked along the mountain, and aloft at the surrounding peaks with the alert glance and minute observation of a hunter. The sun shone, making the most of a propitious interval; the soaked earth steamed, despite a warning chill in the air; there were plenty of clouds about still, but they drifted uncertainly, as if not quite decided as to their next demonstration; what wind was astir came from the northeast.

"Thar'll be sleet afore long," Ranke thought. "The wind's whetted up middlin' sharp an' edgy. Sleet, or snow, one. Six weeks mo' fallin' weather air to be, or ole ground-hog's a liar. 'Twill aim to swop around an' drap some o' all sorts, I reckon."

The clearing in which Ranke's cabin stood was divided into a corn-field or two and a bit of pasture. With even moderate cultivation the land would have been productive, for it was good, dark loam, which would grow anything put into it, provided the crops were not simply planted and left more or less to chance, which was a good deal Ranke's method. Slack as he undoubtedly was, however, in farming matters, the "blue-gum" never seemed to lack money; he never had any surplus to sell, yet was always, apparently, above want, the pinch of "hard-times," or the necessity for overt exertion. Ranke's unexplainable solvency was one of the things about him which bothered the community.

Behind the house the hill sloped upward, heavily wooded above, but in the lower parts roughly

cleared in spots where Ranke had cut fire-wood. One of these clearings, to the left of the cornfield, rounded to the shoulder of the mountain. It was covered with scrub, left cumbering the ground when the heavier growth had been cut away, a sort of jungly *chaparral*, but in no place high enough to conceal a man on horseback. Through it wound the woods road which linked the little homestead with civilization. From in front the land fell away in a gentle slope, which slipped finally into a ravine, through which ran a river, of no great importance ordinarily, but swollen now to a torrent. The sound of its roaring came up to Ranke where he stood and caused him to mutter, *sotto voce:* "Ther water's gwine on like a shook-up hornet's nes'. 'Twill be mighty interruptious to travel, I reckon. Deane Rutherford won't git here to-day. Even thet mare o' his'n couldn't breast it. I wonder if thar's much float runnin'?"

He walked down to the rail-fence which enclosed his domain and leaned against it, looking over. A couple of deer-hounds which accompanied him nosed gravely about, one of them nimbly scaling the fence to pursue his investigations on the other side. The river was plainly visible, tearing along in a turbid flood, stained with soil and ladened with trash, logs, and debris of all sorts. It foamed and curled in places where its passage was opposed by the jutting upward of rocks, or the trunks of trees, erstwhile on its margin, but now nearly in mid-current. It boiled and circled into eddies and whirlpools, and went on its way with a gurgling, snarling roar,

like a creature half choked, and worrying over its food.

From the clearing a trail zig-zagged down to what, in low water, was a fording-place, crossed over, and snaked up the opposite slope, humoring the rise, as a trail must. It was an old trail, very well defined and much used by the mountain folk for crossing over into North Carolina. It circled around Ranke's fence and merged into the road through the *chaparral*, making of the little farm a peninsular partially encircled by highways.

The storm clouds had withdrawn a space, but in the distance they seemed to be drawing together, like troops mustering with serious intent. Close at hand the rain-washed atmosphere was so fine and pure that it seemed to offer no obstruction to sight. The practiced vision of the mountaineer could follow the windings of the trail upward through the denuded forest for miles. Tolerably high up a lightning-riven poplar stood amid gray bowlders, showing a scarred side from which the bark had been ripped, and a skeleton limb or two, like arms, leprous and withered. This tree was the favorite rendezvous of buzzards, and, even as Ranke looked, a couple of the hideous creatures circled slowly into his plane of vision, descended in lessening spirals and found their point of repose upon it. The "blue-gum" swore fretfully. He had a special disgust for buzzards. Sitting aloft with necks outstretched and half-expanded wings, they seemed to overlook him and his belongings and to have him at advantage. "Look-like the stinkin' critters air allus hankerin'

arter a meal o' vittels off'n me or my truck," he was wont to declare.

His glance left the birds and came back to the river, which he regarded aggressively, as though resenting malicious interference with some arrangement.

"Deane 'low'd he'd come," he ruminated. "An' he gin'ally aims to rivet his word. This here infernal high-water mout hold him back though. Him an' me ain't no pertick'ler chums, an' he mout left good-bye at ther sto' well as not. I'd like to have that red mare, durned if I wouldn't. Sound she is, an' active; swift as a blue streak too. Jus' the critter for my trade. Deane's such a sappy fool! Settin' store by a horse like she war a human. Wouldn't take no price, he said. 'Lowed his dad had gi'n her to him jus' afore he pegged out, an' he'd raised her up from a colt. Deane's plumb soft an' redic'l'us! 'Lowin' 'bout *lovin'* a horse outside'n what she's wuth. Wonder what he's gwine to do with her down at them Machine-Works he's gwine to? Better let me have her, 'en sell her down thar. I wonder——" Through his eyes glanced the furtive look which was one of their few changes; there was a break in his thoughts.

Down from the opposite heights floated the sound of a bell, chiming clear and resonant. It held itself above and aloof from the roar of the water, an individual sound, dominant, and in no wise to be blended with the monotone of the flood. Ranke started and stared about him, shrinking a little, and superstitiously bewildered and nervous. Where did it come

from? Out of the air?—out of the infinite? What did it mean? It sounded like the bell of the church in the valley near which he had lived in his childhood. His mother had taken him to that church many a Sunday, and he had perched miserably enough on a narrow, straight-backed bench and blinkingly watched a handsome old gentleman in a white gown toss his arms about and point with his fingers. He had hated those Sunday ordeals; but the sound of the bell had been sweet, floating down the valley to the place where they lived. He had loved to hearken to its invitation as much as he had loathed that which followed acceptance.

What could have brought the thought of that bell to his mind?—the sound of it to his ears? Could he be mistaken? No, there it was again—ringing fully, ringing clearly, shaking out notes rich and mellow as from a throat of silver. The very dogs heard it and stood with muzzles uplifted and ears cocked at attention, as though seeking to solve the mystery!

Ranke's face showed a troubled expression; the sweat stood on his forehead. He could not make it out, either its character, or its meaning. Being ignorant, he was, perforce, superstitious. The unexplainable was, for him, the supernatural. His previous experience in this place showed no parallel. Church bells had never rung for him before from a bare mountain side. The thing must be a sign—a warning—but of what?

The man's sense of humor was deficient. The idea of supernatural interposition for his behoof did not strike him as incongruous. Being to himself the

true center of the universe, his small affairs seemed preponderant—of universal importance. All the same, however, he was not grateful for spiritual solicitude; he was frightened and restive; there were prickly sensations in his flesh, as though his garments were lined with nettles; his blood seemed to chill and move slowly; he wanted to curse for relief, but his tongue refused its office.

After a moment's perturbed scrutiny of the mountain side, during which the bell continued its mystic invocation, Ranke's face cleared, the chill departed from his blood and the terror from his mind. He spat on the ground contemptuously and muttered "I'll be dogged!" in accents of relief mingled with downright self-scorn.

Into the line of view, along the old trail, a horseman was riding. The sun shone on his horse, giving a sheen of satiny sorrel on his simple accoutrements, striking out reflections from the metal mountings of the long rifle across the saddle-bow, the handle of the hunting knife in the belt, and even from the mare's shoes as she picked her feet up. Ranke broke into a laugh, curling his lips back and showing his singular gums. He smote his thigh resonantly, and voiced his satisfaction aloud:

"'Tain't nothin' but that fool Deane Rutherford cuttin'-up monkey-shines arter all! An' me skeer'd nigh into an' agur like a mink a-lookin' at his own eyes in a glass bottle. Deane's done made hisse'f a bell an' hitched it onto his bridle, an' 's gwine bangin' an' blatin' through ther woods settin' folks studyin' 'bout Jedgment an' all sich. He's allus tinkerin'

at some foolishness at the forge—wastin' time an' metal. I wonder ther mare don't fling him. I wish to Gawd she would." This last delivered viciously and with reminiscent anger at his own alarm. He would keep that to himself, however. Deane should not have the laugh on him.

Then he fell to wondering how the crossing would be made, and turned his glance once more to the river. The water hurled along its drift impetuously, eager to get below, as it seemed, and take a hand in the valley destruction. Fording, or even swimming, was out of the question. The only course open to the would-be visitor appeared to be a return along the home trail. "Mout as well er come ther long way at fust," Ranke commented peevishly.

When he lifted his eyes to the mountain again the horsemen had disappeared. The bell too had ceased chiming. The hill-side, moist and dank, rose silent and deserted; the old trail wound its tortuous way among the trees in full sight. Ranke stared and rubbed his eyes. What could have become of them? At his last look the sorrel mare had been stepping out into the open near the ford. There was not a tree there bulky of trunk enough to hide a mounted man. What new trick was this?

Then the dogs began to bark with the sudden access of vigilance which presages a visitor. The hound on the inside of the fence loped away, giving tongue; the hound on the outside cleared the obstruction at a bound, caught up with his speeding fellow, and raced him tumultuously across the lot to the road through the *chaparral.* A succession of

clear whistles and calls cleft the air, and a tall young fellow in homespun, begirt with a belt, but unarmed, strode forward on foot, laid his hand on the top rail of the fence and lifted his body over it with a sinuous spring. The dogs met him clamorously, but without hostile intent; they scented an acquaintance in Deane Rutherford.

Ranke stood motionless, his slow glance shifting from the mountain-side to the advancing figure and back again. Which was real, and which semblance? A moment since he could have sworn that Deane Rutherford was coming toward him on the farther side of the torrent riding his sorrel mare, and now here was the same man coming toward him from a totally different direction on foot. What did it mean? Had he seen a ghost? But ghosts are not usually abroad by daylight. Then a thought came to him which set his superstitious soul to shivering and brought the cold drops again to his forehead. He understood it now. This fellow coming across the lot gayly whistling to the prancing dogs was the real man — the other had been an illusion—a mirage.

His soul sickened and fainted with fear; he looked and felt, for a moment, like a man who has witnessed the signing of his own death warrant. He whispered a fierce oath, huskily, in a throat as dry as a lime-kiln.

CHAPTER II.

TUBAL-CAIN.

RANKE had no more knowledge of atmospheric than of emotional and imaginative possibilities. That which seemed manifested to his bodily vision he accepted on *prima facie* evidence, without argument, or any attempt at practical explanation. The belief that a sight such as had been accorded to him presages calamity is as firmly rooted in the minds of hill dwellers as is the belief in a future of material bliss and material burning. Why should Ranke kick against that which was accepted by his world as verity. He did not. He thrust the whole thing away with precipitation, and advanced to meet and welcome his guest with a boisterous show of cordiality and interest.

"Howdy, Deane! Howdy!" shaking hands with effusion. "I'd in-about gi'n you out, 'long o' rain an' freshets an' sich-like. How'd you git here?" The question had almost a coercive tone.

He had come to Jim Trotter's the night before, the young fellow explained. The river had been crossable then; the back water had come down in the night. He was going the rounds among his old acquaintances, bidding farewell to all before he went down to the valley to try his luck among

strangers in a strange city. It might be a good while before he could get back to see them, so he wanted to shake hands around with everybody he knew. The lad's tone was cheerful. He was about to break no very strong ties, and love of adventure and hope in the untried are dominant at nineteen.

"Air you walkin'?"

Ranke had preceded his guest into the cabin, and was stirring the fire, laying on fresh logs, and covering them with chips and dry wood. The light from the open doorway fell upon it so that the flames looked pallid and put out of countenance. Ranke shut it.

The young fellow nodded in reply to his host's question. He had loaned his mare the day before to Mr. Voss, the valley man who was stopping at the smithy. Voss had wanted to ride across to Tuckahoe Cove, where some fellows had promised to get up a deer hunt for him. He—Deane—would have gone himself, but for wanting to tell the folks goodbye. Then he broke out about his plans exuberantly, not because he felt any special friendliness for Ranke, or any particular desire to distinguish him by confidence, but because he was young and full of himself, and so confident that the whole world must be interested in that which filled heaven and earth for him. A week ago he had told Ranke that he would include him in the farewell round, and it was because of that promise he was here. He felt sorry for Ranke, cooped up among the hills away from all the possibilities of life. He felt sorry for everybody who was not going down to Montaubon

with Mr. Voss to be entered at his Machine-Works and given a chance to learn and to do. That was all he had ever wanted—a chance. And now it had come he was exultant, and sorry for those miserables who appeared so content to be left behind.

Everything had changed for him since this party of valley sportsmen had come up to the mountains after big game. There were four in the party, but the blacksmith's wife could only accommodate one in the little roof-room where he, himself, slept. The smith's own family bid fair to exceed the habitable space in his domicile ere long, and there had really seemed no place of lodgment even for one until he had volunteered to occupy a pallet on the roof-room floor, for the nonce, giving up his own bed to the stranger. So Mr. Voss had come to them, and the rest of the party quartered themselves where they could. Mr. Voss was partner in a big iron manufacturing plant down at Montaubon, where they made all sorts of machines such as he—Deane—had never seen in his life, or even dreamed of.

He had always had a hankering after making things, and working in metal, as far back as he could remember. It was for this reason that he had transferred himself and his few head of stock to the blacksmith's cabin and pastures after death had broken up his own home. It had seemed to him that the hammer and forge might supply that which he needed. His few acres of homestead he had rented to a neighbor, with his house and rude plenishing just as it stood. This had been three years ago, and during that time he had wrought in the forge like

Tubal-Cain, striving to get at knowledge by inspiration. It had not taken him many months to acquire all Toby Blake's skill, and to turn out better smith's work than his preceptor. But that was not what he wanted. Anybody could make and set a horseshoe, hammer nails and bolts, and forge, or mend the simple implements in daily use and demand. Deane's restlessness had returned, harrying him, like a pent-up force seeking an outlet. The forge was inadequate—or rather there was none here to teach him how to make it so.

Then Mr. Voss had come, like a sluice-master, to open the gates, and let the force work to legitimate ends. Deane, to use his own term, "took a notion" to Mr. Voss at once, and cheerfully put himself out of the way to show the stranger civility. He had shown him the likeliest stands for waiting while the beaters drove the deer down from the fastnesses, had discovered to him the haunts of pheasant and partridge, had taken him by dawn-light to his own particular turkey-blind, and, deepest proof of good-will, had made him welcome to the use of his mare, a beautiful animal who was the joy of his heart and, as yet, sole mistress of his affections.

In requital of all this Mr. Voss had led the lad on to talk of himself, his unrest, his ignorance and his aspirations. He had hearkened understandingly to Deane's crude ideas, and had viewed his crude inventive efforts without denominating them "foolishness" and "projeckin'." So it had come to pass that one morning as the pair huddled together in the turkey-blind before daylight waiting for those

wary birds to come down from the wilds for their breakfast, Mr. Voss had proposed that Deane should return with him to Montaubon and take a position in the shops. He spoke of wages and terms of apprenticeship, but all that had been babble in Deane's ears. He had clutched at his chance without regard to details, and, in his exuberance, had bounced to his feet behind the brushwood, which served as a blind, with so much activity to behold a suddenly glorified world, that a flock of wild turkeys, led by a couple of vigilant gobblers, who were stealing cautiously down to the feeding-place, paused, held themselves an instant on one foot, with the other uplifted and doubled into a fist, and then got them back into the forest with marvelous celerity.

By the blacksmith's advice he held an auction of his stock and household gear, most of which Blake cannily bought in for himself at reduced rates, but all offers for the sorrel mare were stoutly refused. When asked what he meant to do with her, Deane replied, take her with him; and when additionally scoffed at for supposing that to keep a horse in the city was, for a poor working man, as simple a matter as keeping one in the mountains, he waxed peppery, and bade the people mind their own business. To work for a horse was quite as easy as to work for a wife, he maintained, and turned a deaf ear to their laughter. Deane was a strong-willed young fellow, and hot-tempered, as are most workers in metal. He was popular, too, and the people were sorry to have him go away.

Blake voiced the general sentiment, the day of

Deane's sale, to a knot of men gathered about the smithy.

"Deane air peppery with his tongue an' rank with his fists whenst his monkey's up," that worthy averred, feeling called on to give his whilom associate his due because of the good bargains he had made out of him. "But thar ain't a mite o' meanness in ther chap frum top-knot to boot-sole. He air fiery, but he air true, an' he forges in-about as well as any lot o' metal I ever sot hand to. Deane ain't nobody's fool nother, as thet thar valley man knows same as I does. He ain't tolein' Deane off 'long o' relishment fur his comp'ny. He air tolein' him bekase thar's truck in ther boy—truck whar'll work up well fur market. Ther valley man, he knows now—an' I reckon Deane'll find out."

This last was certainly what Deane Rutherford proposed to do.

After the young fellow's plans had been exhaustively canvassed, even down to the time of his start, which was to be at noon the following day, Ranke proposed to his guest that they should step outside and take a look at the weather.

It had clouded over again; the sky was leaden, in hue like wet limestone; the crest of the mountain was hidden; the wind sighed sharply among the gorges. The roar of the water was subdued, as though the sound were held down and flattened. On the blasted poplar limb the buzzards still roosted, but with closed wings and necks drawn in to the shoulders, as though the season were unpropitious for social amenities. The cocks and hens in the

door-yard, of which Ranke kept a goodly assortment, had sheltered under the steps and the ash-hopper, and one old rooster, more weather-wise than his fellows, was escorting his own immediate female following into the hen-house. The atmosphere had a ting and tingle added to its rawness which suggested that the moisture it held might be turning to ice.

Deane proposed taking his departure at once, but Ranke overruled him.

"Take dinner 'long o' me," he hospitably proposed. "It's soon in the day an' mighty liable to clear afore sun-down. Thar's gwine to be a little flurry o' snow, or sleet, tereckly, an' you'll be ketched good if you start right now. The nigh-cut home air blocked by the freshet. It's in-about five mile to the smithy the way you've got to travel. Stop an' git a mouffull o' vittles afore you start."

Deane glanced about uncertainly. He was in two minds about the matter.

"Thar's a rooster—a big, fat one—roastin' in the oven, with sweet-taters an' pork banked up a-side o' him," the host observed casually. "He must be in-about done by now, an I kin fling in an' ash-cake in a minute. Thar's some tasty cider in the bar'l too—got a beady head to it, sich as ain't common. Stop to dinner an' sample it."

Thus allured, Deane consented. He had breakfasted before daylight, and it was now past noon. His inner man fairly ravened. He knew Ranke's culinary skill of old, and held the opinion that not a woman in the district had a tastier hand at seasoning, or a superior knack at basting and browning.

CHAPTER III.

DEANE'S RED MARE.

By the time dinner had been despatched and the dishes stored away it was raining again, with a strong dash of sleet. Deane opened the door and stared out inquiringly. The out-put from above was regular and gave promise of holding.

From the cabin eaves water, mingled with ice, shot with a rattle and swish; along the edges of the shingles icicles were forming.

Travel seemed uninviting and Deane returned to the hearth, where he leaned backward against the rough mantel and toasted his booted legs. He would wait a bit before breasting the elements. The stuff falling outside might turn to snow presently, which would not be so unpleasant to walk in—he hated the sting of sleet in his face. He was a well-grown fellow, but loose-knit and coltish yet, as became his youth. When he should have filled out and compacted he would be a man of unusual size and strength. His face was intelligent and a trifle rugged, the chin square, the nostrils thin and sensitive, the eyes of a clear, warm hazel.

Opposite him, as he stood, was the open parallelogram of the cabin window, ill-fitting, and glazed with small, libelous panes, of a quality rich only in

defects. Nature, viewed through this medium, was distorted to a caricature and well-nigh turned upside down. Deane speedily wearied of the outlook and, after a little, he yawned, not with discourteous intention, but obeying a natural impulse. Ranke, who was whittling a trigger for a disabled rabbit-trap, put up his knife and bit of wood and proposed a game of cards.

"'Twill he'p time along 'twell it clears up," he affirmed, as one aroused to the requirements of hospitality. "This here's a mighty say-nothin' house fur young folks, bein' as thar ain't no women-critters about, an' me gittin' into lonesome ways livin' 'long o' myself. Ole Sledge mout keep you from plumb-crackin' yer jaw-bone in two."

Deane laughed and assented. He counted himself a knowing hand at the favorite local amusement of "seven-up."

While Ranke turned an empty flour-barrel on end to serve as a card-table, set chairs, and rummaged in his cupboard for a pack of cards, Deane stirred up the fire and replenished it, settling the logs into place with sundry well-directed applications of his boot-heel.

"Thar's the tongses,' Ranke suggested, without looking around. "They mout save yer leather from scorchin', I reckon."

"An' pinch my fingers clean off'n me," Deane commented, regarding with disfavor the implement in question, a master-piece of iniquity with a limber joint and knobbed head, which stood in the chimney corner and tempted men to their destruction.

"Them thar air the no-countest, onreliablest, viciousest tongses in the distric'. An' the man whar handles 'em air gwine to git sorry fur it mighty quick. Las' time I was here I ondertook to heft up a log with 'em, an' I'll bedogged if they didn't twirl right over an' nip on-ter my thumb same as a tarrier grabbin' a rat. Pinched up a right smart blood-blister, they did."

"R'iled you mightily, too, didn't it?"

The host's tone was amused, but pacific. The depreciation of his household goods did not wound him; in sooth he was conscious that from nibs to hinge the construction of his tongs was evil, while for the malevolence of its trick of twisting there could be neither palliation nor defence. The sole use he himself ever put the tongs to was that of a hammer, for which the heavy iron knob finishing off the top seemed peculiarly adapted.

"Mad as a hornet," Deane acquiesced cheerfully. "I tried my levelest to wring 'em in two, but thar j'int was too tough for me. Whyn't you fetch 'em to the shop an' git 'em fixed, Ranke? They ain't nothing but a torment." He was going to, Ranke explained, only he kept forgetting it. The knob was handy for knocking in nails and such like, when his hammer was out of place. It "could hit a plumb lick." Ranke was busy at his cupboard, and only half attending. Old Sledge and whiskey were wedded in his thought in indissoluble union. He had set out a quart bottle and was now hunting for tumblers. "Toddy, or straight?" he questioned, consulting his guest.

"Toddy, thank'ee," was the response. "I ain't got much head for liquor, nohow."

Ranke supplied sugar and water and compounded the mixture. He usually took his liquor *au natural*, but this time, in deference to hospitality, he diluted. While he busied himself with the brew, Deane ranged up alongside the barrel and shuffled the cards.

"Cut for deal."

He extended the pack as he spoke.

For the next half hour the silence was unbroken, save by the verbal requirements of the game; the alternations of "beg," "stand," "give ye one," and the reckoning of the score.

The stakes, at first, were small, but the players were well matched, and, as the interest deepened and the liquor disappeared, the amount of the money staked increased. Deane was flush, having been paid up part of the purchase money of his gear with reasonable promptitude. He had in his pocket seventy-five dollars, a sum which to his inexperience appeared inexhaustible. Ranke seemed also well vamped, but, after the first game or two, luck set against him. Five times in succession Deane got out in two deals, holding "high," "low," and "jack" every time. The veins showed on Ranke's forehead, and once or twice he swore under his breath. Deane was flushed with victory and the liquor was mounting to his head. He craved success, and it excited him.

Outside the rain had ceased utterly and snow was falling; but neither man noticed the change.

Presently Ranke got up, crossed to a niche in the wall and took therefrom a dirty shot-bag tied around the mouth with a leather shoe-string. This he set on the table beside his elbow, and the game went on. It was Ranke's deal and the score stood three to four, Ranke being in the lead this time. The cards fell rapidly and again fortune favored Deane, who went out with a rush.

"'Tain't no use playin' agin such luck," Ranke growled discontentedly. "Ther devil air a-backin' you, or you've got a cut-throat mortgage on ther cards. I dunno which. I've got a good notion to pull out an' quit."

Deane laughed boisterously.

"I wouldn't," he asserted; "not beat I wouldn't. Never quit beat. Luck'll swop aroun' arter 'while. Try another deal or two an' git yer money back. 'Tain't altogether *luck* nohow. I kin *play* some, I reckon."

His voice had boastful inflections. He considered himself the man of greater prowess and gloried in it. Ranke felt nettled.

"If I play on, will you 'gree to quit whenst I sesso?" he demanded.

Deane nodded. He was thirsty for continued victory, but had sufficient decency not to want to sicken his host.

"Shuffle them cards *good*."

While Deane complied, Ranke opened the shot-bag and poured gold on the table—clean, shining gold, which fell in a heap and glittered and scintillated in the firelight, making a flare of richness

and color in contrast to the dinginess of the cards, the shadows of the swart-browed room, and the rough habiliments of the players. Deane had never seen so much money in his life; had never accurately realized that there was so much money in the world. The glitter of it got into his eyes and half-blinded him, the richness of it into his brain, already a little off balance with liquor.

"How much is it?" he queried.

"Three hund'ed an' fifty dollars," Ranke answered. "What air you gwine to put up agin it?"

Then Deane added an annex to his original folly of persistence. Whiskey and success had made him seem to himself invincible. He pushed forward his winnings and supplemented them with the remaining contents of his pocket-book. The amount, in notes and silver, footed up to a hundred and fifty dollars.

"'Tain't enough," Ranke objected.

"It's all," Deane remonstrated, picking up the cards. "Even your's off."

He held out the pack to be cut.

"Air you gwine back on yer luck that a-way?" Ranke queried.

Deane hesitated.

"I ain't got no more to stake."

"Fling in the mare. She'll even it. I offer'd two hund'ed fur her myself t'other day. 'Tain't much resk with ther luck you're havin';" his voice had a grudgeful, protestant tone.

Under ordinary conditions Deane would as soon have eked out the stake with his own soul. But

Ranke's reluctance to continue the game, real or simulated, had flattered his vanity and raised his self-confidence to high-water mark. To himself, he appeared betting almost upon a certainty and, with scarce a thought of how the thing might turn out, he assented to the other's proposition.

Now, Ranke was in truth the magician at cards which the other believed himself to be. No man had ever detected the "blue-gum" in any overt black-legism, but he undoubtedly possessed a gift of shuffling upon occasion which was little short of miraculous. The deal was his and he turned up Jack, which scored one and gave him an advantage at the outset; the other points stood "low" and "game" for the dealer, while his opponent made "high." On Deane's deal the cards fell more evenly, each player scoring two, which set the record three to five. The faces of both were intent, on Deane's forehead the sweat stood in beads, and his thin nostril beat in and out. Ranke's countenance was moveless as that of a mummied Pharaoh, but in his eyes cunning flared, faded, and then flared again, like a brush fire. The deal had come to him again, and he handled the cards with swift movements. Once more the Jack was turned, and when Deane "begged" he gave him one promptly. Diamonds were trumps. Deane led the ace of hearts, to which the other followed suit. Then, playing warily, he led the king of clubs, on which fell the three of diamonds. The lead now was Ranke's, and he played with assurance, as one certain of how the cards will fall. In a moment it was over.

"High—low—game—an' Jack turned up," he drawled, pushing back his chair.

Deane's face was chalky; his eyes blazed. "Come on," he muttered hoarsely, and picked up the cards.

Ranke shook his head. "I've had enough," he said. "You 'greed to quit whenst I sesso, an' I sesso now. I'm done."

"No!" thundered Deane, "I want another chance! I claims another chance!"

"What on? You're stone broke."

"I ain't! Thar's the house an' lan'. I'll bet the lan' agin the horse—even. The money kin go. What I wants air my horse."

The furtive look flashed through Ranke's eyes again, his lips curled away from his teeth and his discolored gums. He looked across into the strained countenance opposite with sneering amusement, but his words were, apparently, those of righteousness.

"That's foolishness. Ther lan' an' house air wuth four times what ther horse is. I ain't aimin' to cheat you out'n nothin'—not in my own house."

"That ain't nothin'," the other responded. "I raised up the filly an' sets sto' by her. She's like my own flesh an' blood to me. Take the farm an' give her back. Git out'n a deed an' I'll sign it. Thar ain't nothin' I'm keerin' fur but the horse. She ain't nothin to you. Take the lan'."

Tears rushed to his fierce eyes, drowning their fire, his voice shook, and his hands fumbled the cards, letting half the pack fall. The picture of his horse, his glossy beauty, rose before him; he felt the

touch of her head against his arm, the soft pushing of her nose in his hand; he heard the low, gladsome whinny with which she always greeted his approach; he saw the love in her beautiful eyes, and moved by it all he pleaded with the victor.

"Take the lan'."

"I don't want it."

"Play ag'in then!" desperately.

"I've done quit."

"You won't do neither?"

"No."

"You air gwine to keep my horse anyhow?"

"Yes."

Deane sprang to his feet, beside himself with grief and passion.

"By ——, you *sha'n't* then!" he threatened. "You *shall* play—damn you!"

"Who's to make me?" derided the other.

"I will."

Ranke laid his fingers to his nose with a gesture of contempt. "Don't make such a rumbumpshus fool o' yerse'f, Deane Rutherford," he counseled. "Anybody'd think you'd played away yer soul's salvation an' all yer fambly's, stiddier one lonesome horse-critter."

Then Deane struck him.

In a second both were a-foot and fighting savagely. They were fairly well matched, for what Ranke lacked in height and bulk he made up in agility. He dealt his blows swiftly, and for the first few moments had the advantage, pressing his adversary backward toward the fire-place. The barrel had

been overturned in the first onslaught, cards and money lay scattered about the floor, the gold winking in dark corners like eyes. The fighting men trampled it under foot.

At last Deane contrived to break Ranke's guard and get to close quarters, where his superior bulk told; in an instant he had secured a body-grip, lifted his opponent and borne him to the ground. "Will you sell back, or play now?" he growled, bearing down on the other's chest.

Ranke made no answer; his swarthy face was almost purple, his eyes narrowed and scintillated; there was froth on his curled lips, and his white teeth gleamed wickedly. He turned his head with a swift movement, heaved his body upward and snapped at his victim, suddenly, fiercely, as a dog might, seeking to flesh his teeth.

Then everything went out of Deane's head except his own awful danger. All the stories he had heard about "blue-gums" and the venom of their bite, surged through his mind, obliterating every instinct save that of self-preservation. The congested face, the gleaming teeth, the foaming mouth filled him with loathing, with terror. He dared not let go his hold, he dared not lift himself from the other's struggling, prostrate body—it was kill, or be killed. His eye fell on the tongs, and scarcely realizing that which he did, he freed one hand suddenly, caught up the weapon and brought the heavy iron knob crashing down on his adversary's skull. Ranke's body bounded convulsively under him, and then collapsed.

Deane staggered to his feet and stared down on that which he had done like a man bewildered. There had been no murder in his heart, only blind rage, and, at last, awful, unreasoning terror. He looked down stupidly, feeling heavy and sick, with strained nerves, and breath coming and going in sobs.

Perhaps the man was not dead. There was very little blood. Even as the thought crossed his mind that unmistakable, indescribable change flitted over Ranke's face, his flesh quivered and stiffened, his jaws fell apart.

Deane would not believe his own eyesight. He lifted the body and bore it to the bed, and labored over it with water, friction, and whiskey as he had seen others labor over people in swoons. After a time it worked into even his benumbed senses that the thing was useless, and he desisted. The blow had fallen near the temple and the skull was crushed in.

Like a man in a dream, Deane settled the body with its face toward the wall, as though sleeping. Then, still like a man in a dream, he went out from the cabin, closing the door carefully behind him, and leaving the money scattered about where it had fallen.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE IRON-WORKS.

To dwellers among the heights, away up in regions where the great waterways have their birth, the town of Montaubon commends itself as, if not quite a city of the plains, a place decidedly nested in a valley. By visitors from flat, tide-water counties, on the other hand, it is considered hilly. And so it is, but after a seemly fashion which gives fresh air and natural drainage, while allowing its streets, whether they shoulder a rise, fling themselves across a ravine, or handsomely humor a summit, to take their way sturdily, accommodating all reasonable traffic without undue suggestion of necessity for stairways or balustrades. Even in the residence portion, where the eternal strife to get highest sets the houses aloft, the scrambling may be done without alpenstocks. And for the business parts of the place, they are positively level.

Notably is this the case with the portion of the town wherein the big iron-works and machine-shops of Brainard, Voss & Co. are situated. The works, with all necessary appurtenances of sheds and yards, constitute quite a village of itself, wherein prodigies were performed by day and by night with molten metal, whirling wheels, lathes, pulleys, crude ore, oil, limestone and profanity.

A wonderful place it is, and a wonderful place it looked to the young woman who stood in one of the smutty gateways glancing about her with vivid and undisguised interest. The dingy vista in front ended in a huge open doorway, through which she could discern a jumble of top-hamper, leathern bands, wire-cordage and trolleys, amid which swung buckets of liquid fire, pale yellow, and glowing with the color of the sun's disk at noontide. As she looked one of these migratory caldrons lowered slowly and was caught by a human figure, black and sooty a gnome, who canted it over and, apparently, spilled its contents on the ground.

The young woman was comely, but devoid of self-consciousness, and stared happily about, too much interested in the surroundings to be mindful of the curiosity which she herself excited. Her costume was of cloth, dark blue as to color, and fitted trimly a *swelte*, graceful figure, and her hands and feet showed a finish which went to the hearts of the men looking at her, so different was it from the state of things pertaining to their own feminine world.

In a moment she was joined by a stout, middle-aged gentleman with very black hair and eyes, who commenced speaking almost before he reached her side.

"It's all right, Joyce. I've seen Mr. Voss and he has no sort of objection to your going through the works while I transact my business. He's going to put you in charge of his foreman, a fellow well up in all this sort of thing, who will show you around and explain matters. I've told him your fancy for

investigation, and—— But here he is to speak for himself."

The stout gentleman—Charles Ruthven by name—interrupted himself to present to his niece two other men who joined the group. One was small and nondescript, Mr. Voss. The other was tall, mightily developed, and possessed a face which interested at the first glance, because of its character and strength. "That is no city product," was the thought which flashed through the young woman's mind as she acknowledged the presentation to her of Mr. Deane Rutherford. She looked at him straight, with as honest a pair of eyes as ever beamed through dark lashes, and decided on the instant that she was quite willing to accept him as her cicerone.

"I'm sorry to be debarred from the pleasure of making the rounds with you myself, Miss Ruthven," Voss said, with old-fashioned gallantry. "But business, you know;" he lifted his shoulders. "Well, it is only pleasure deferred for your uncle, and I will join you as speedily as possible. Meanwhile, Mr. Rutherford will take care of you. You'll find him a capital guide. He's been with us ten years and is practically familiar with every department. I'm afraid, however, there is nothing specially interesting going on in the works this afternoon, is there, Rutherford?"

Deane shook his head. Nothing of sight-seeing interest, he feared.

"But it's all a sight to me, the whole *ensemble*," Joyce cheerily declared. "I'm country come to town, Mr. Voss, and everything is new and thrilling.

I go about flattening my nose against windows, and obtruding my person into unexpected places. Like a negro, 'I'se jus' a-lookin' to see what I *kin* see.' Never fear but I'll find the works interesting."

Her freshness pleased the men, and they smiled good-humoredly, her uncle supplementing her statement with the declaration that he had become better acquainted with the city of Montaubon in the past seven days than in all the previous thirty years of his residence. His niece had "passed in and out through the gateways, and sought diligently in the highways and streets thereof," he informed them, adding that he feared Mr. Rutherford's patience would need "half-soling" before she got through with him.

"I hope you don't mind answering questions *very* much," the young lady said, looking straight at Rutherford. "My present attitude of mind is a chronic wanting to know the 'becausing' of things, as I once heard a clever little girl express it."

Rutherford professed his willingness to be put in the witness-box with great cordiality. His social opportunities had been limited, and of ladies, their manners and methods, his ignorance was profound. In his soul he feared them as things beyond calculation and dangerous; and when requested by Mr. Voss to take this particular specimen of the genus under his wing, for the nonce, had felt restive, and as if he would much rather run a mile the other way. Not thus was his feeling after five moments of her society. Her frankness disarmed his embarrassment, and her interest in the things which in-

terested him and made up his environment took him out of himself. Instead of relapsing into helplessness the moment he was left alone with her, he briskly inquired where she wished to go first.

"There," she responded, indicating the building in front of them. "I want to see what those goblins are doing with the buckets of sunshine."

"That's melted iron," he explained, "and they are making pipes of it—drain-pipes, and sewer and gas pipes. It isn't pretty work, like molding household utensils. I wish you'd come down yesterday. We ran off a lot of pots, kettles, and fixtures for stoves. It's interesting to see the molds broken. It's sooty as a chimney down here, Miss Ruthven, so look out for your dress, and mind the puddles of water about the floor."

He kicked a bit of plank, garnished raggedly with nails, out of her path, and put out his hand to stop a workman, who was backing straight at them with an end of loose wire in his hand.

Near the entrance they paused in front of that which looked to be a blank wall with a small reservoir not unlike a baptismal font pressed close against it. As Joyce was about to inquire its meaning, a workman stepped forward with a long rod, sharpened at the end, and prodded a hole in the wall, from which presently issued a stream of pale golden fluid about the size of a man's thumb. It ran swiftly and pooled in the reservoir, quivering and flashing with indescribable brightness. Then voices shouted, "Look out!" and other voices, "Lower away!" and the great buckets came swinging around

and slipped earthward in regular sequence to be refilled. Men with long iron ladles rushed forward, grimy with oil, soot and iron-filings, and ladled up the fiery stuff in haste and slopped it into the buckets; and one of them rolled up a ball of wet clay on the end of a rod and stood by to plug up the vent when the word should be given. Joyce watched it all eagerly, and when, every now and then, there would be a sudden puff and splutter and bright sparks would spring upward and shower in gold, violet, green and crimson, showing bravely against the sooty atmosphere, her eyes would sparkle in unison, and she would glance at Rutherford delightedly.

"How pretty it is!" she exclaimed; "look at the colors! are they not beautiful? And that stream of molten metal, white-hot. What is it like?"

"Fox-fire," Rutherford answered, unhesitatingly. "Don't you think so?"

She nodded her head in approval.

"Yes, that is it. Once when I was a little girl I slipped away with my brother and a lot of negro children into the woods to play at coon hunting. It was long after dark and had been raining. We poked about vigorously, making believe we were having a good time, but secretly frightened. After a bit we came on a dead tree, rotting and phosphorescent; all one side of it was a flare of fox-fire, and there were dabs and pools of it all around. You never saw such scared babes in the woods in your life as we were. The negroes knew what it was, but Fred and I didn't, and we just said, 'Oh, Lordy!' once, and then clasped hands and sped for our lives."

Rutherford laughed. He remembered the time when coming suddenly on the glare of decaying phosphorescent wood on a rainy, lonesome night had tried his own nerves. He had stepped into a hole filled with it once, and for a terrified instant imagined that he had broken through into the bottomless pit. It had been years since he had thought about fox-fire, but somehow this young woman seemed to bring the woods about him again.

It bothered him a little, for he had striven to put away the old life and forget it in study and reading, and the press of new incidents and happenings; but it excited him also. As the girl moved, he followed her with his eyes, and kept close to her side, calling her attention to this and to that, talking cleverly, often brilliantly, seeking almost unconsciously to awaken and stimulate her interest in himself, as well as in his surroundings.

And as men show to best advantage amid familiar things, he succeeded and made an impression.. Had Joyce made his acquaintance under ordinary social circumstances, it is quite possible that she might never, consciously, have individualized him; but seeing, and, what is more, hearing him in his natural *habitat*, so to speak, she invested him with full personality, and decided with her customary zeal that he was quite the most affording man it had yet been her fortune to meet.

They made the round of the shops, chatting merrily, and then Rutherford took her up an inclined plane into an exceeding high place, into which a short flume conducted the ore brought from other

places of deposit on trucks which trafficked backward and forward on a little elevated railway. Masses of the brownish, rusty looking stuff lay about on the floor, with attendant masses of crushed limestone; and in the wall over against them was a square hole into the furnace, which seemed the entrance to a veritable abyss of brimstone and burning.

Joyce gazed down into it with fascinated eyes, and Rutherford gazed at her. Again she turned to him.

"I want to be buried on a mountain-side," she abruptly announced, "with the spring of grass and flowers and the sough of pines overhead. I want a clear spring close by, with a rippling branch running from it, and all the cool, moist things one can think of about my grave. Think of being put in a pit like that!" pointing with an abhorrent finger, "or having the defenceless body of one you love put in. I don't care what science says, or how insensible death makes one. It's horrible!"

Rutherford nodded in agreement. He knew that this was sentiment without alloy, but he did not mind it. The ultimate resting-place of her desire seemed preferable to him also. And the more, that he knew of a man having come to his death as well as burial in this very furnace. He spoke of it to her.

"It was before I came to the works," he said, in reply to a shuddering question. "The men told me about it. The poor fellow was drunk and none knew it. He was up here alone, tending the furnace, and must have overbalanced himself shoveling in ore

and fallen in. Another workman, who was coming to relieve him, got to the door about the time it occurred. He heard a sort of curious, appalling shriek, like nothing human, he said, and when he got to the furnace there was a darkish lump to be seen amid the flames. The man could never tell about it, even months afterward, without going all to pieces and crying."

The woman who was listening had tears in her eyes also; she raised them to his almost brimming over. "Could nothing be done?" she questioned, pitifully.

Rutherford shook his head. "I doubt if there were even bits of calcined bones left among the slag," he declared. Then he tried to make her understand something of fusion, and the specific amount of heat required to convert the brown ore at her feet into that which she had called "molten sunshine."

In the furnace-room they were presently joined by Mr. Voss and the young lady's uncle, and Rutherford was obliged to give place, secretly against his will, to the older men. He noticed, however, that for the rest of the time they were together the girl's mood seemed less spontaneous, and that her merry words were fewer. He hated himself for having saddened her with his grewsome reminiscences, and then, when he recalled the up-glance of her eyes through big tears, he was glad he had done it.

CHAPTER V.

"TO TREAD TURF AGAIN, OLD HORSE."

DURING the week following her visit to the iron-works Rutherford occupied considerable space in Joyce Ruthven's thoughts. He had opened for her a new world, so to speak—a world in which men toiled with their hands and suffered with their bodies. He had brought close to her things which heretofore had been abstract, and made her sensible of the achievement, purpose and pain which are incorporated in the very garments humanity wears, and the very utensils wherewith it is served. Life feeding on death ceased to be a poetical illustration, and announced itself a grisly fact. She began to think about it all, to wonder, and to push out inquisitive feelers from her own circumscribed life into the vastness of the unknown. It is a crucial time with a mind when it quits working along the lines of precedent and commences to open up new ground for itself. Its first movements are generally iconoclastic, the felling of timber and burning of undergrowth, and it is just here where the danger lies, since an over-energetic mind is apt to forget both beauty and shade in its pioneer efforts, and to make corn-land of all, instead of bits of *pleasance* and bits of farm. Utility is good, and, doubtless, indispensable, but man lives not by bread alone.

From a too desperate recognition of facts, Joyce was saved by her sex, and also by the omnipresent sentiment which goes to the make-up of most Southern women. Her intellect was as clear and logical as the best, up to a certain point, but it never got the whip-hand of her feelings.

She put a great many questions to her uncle about Rutherford—where he came from, what he did at the works, what family of Rutherfords he belonged to, and the like. All of which converted Mr. Ruthven into a living negation. He knew nothing about the young fellow, he declared, had not even been aware that he shared the general blessing of existence until that afternoon. Mr. Voss had spoken of Rutherford with enthusiasm; had called him a wonderful development from adverse conditions, and a mechanical genius. What the conditions had been, Ruthven knew not, nor had he inquired, taking it for granted that poverty and the customary educational scramble made them up largely. For the young man's genius—that might be; the world was full of genius, according to individual representation, at least, although but to one or two in a generation was it given to make names wherewith to conjure. At the family question, Ruthven laughed aloud. According to him, the Rutherfords of Virginia were scattered abroad in great multitude; to use the vernacular, the very "woods were full of them."

After her return home the young lady's interest flickered and died down; but it did not altogether go out. Under the light ashes of subsequent events the embers smoldered, ready to flare into flame

again should any wind of circumstance chance to blow strongly upon them.

With Rutherford the impression made, with time underwent a somewhat similar process, only that with him, in the first instance, it had contained both a personal and appropriative impulse. His first definite thought about her had been "that's a woman to trust," his second "that's the sort of woman I want for my wife." Later in the interview, when she had up-lifted to him tear-filled eyes, he had not thought at all—only felt, strange, indescribable things that prickled his soul as an electric shock would have prickled his body. Once, a couple of days after her visit, in a foregathering of sentiment, he had betaken himself to the dirty little furnace-room with half conscious intent to muse upon her image and, if possible, to renew the novel sensations already described. The experiment had not been a success. A lot of sooty, perspiring workmen, with the aid of shovels and profanity, had been freeing the flume from an overplus—"onchokin' her," they called it. Rutherford had watched them in disgust for a moment, his thought perched upon the fence which divides sentiment from absurdity, with a leg on each side, as it were. When a particularly fat, squabby little negro, crow-black, and as droll as a Barbary ape, thrust himself and his shovel into a place where there was no call for either, and received from a neighboring elbow a lunge in the stomach which set him capering and blaspheming upon the identical spot whereon Rutherford had intended to conjure his vision, a climax had been reached which

caused the young fellow to retreat in undisguised hilarity, fully cured of all desire to attitudinize amid practical surroundings.

Sometimes, however, when he was alone at his work in the modeling-room, or busy at night with books, drawings and mathematical instruments, the circle of polarized light within which his work rested would appear to broaden out, to grow soft in its luminosity, and take on the similitude of a brightening for sunrise. Then, unsummoned, the face of Joyce Ruthven would grow before his mental vision until it well-nigh appeared to assume material substance, and the impression she had made upon him would renew itself.

About the middle of October of that same year Rutherford was in his own particular den at the works, busy with drawings and calculations. On the desk beside him was a model of an intricate bit of machinery, to which he referred from time to time. His forehead was corrugated with perpendicular lines between the brows, and his eyes were intent and brooding; elusive numerals sped through his brain, with thought in active pursuit, but frequently not nimble enough to catch them; his hand moved spasmodically, now making lines and figures, and again beating impatiently with the point of the pencil upon the paper.

Into his absorption broke stridently a voice keyed to concert pitch, and a woolly head was thrust through the door-way. Both head and voice thereunto pertaining, belonged to a descendant of Ham employed about the works as a messenger boy.

This worthy vociferated: "Mr. Ruth'ford, Mr. Voss, he say, you mus' come down ter de countin'-room d'reck'ly, sar. Say he in a pow'ful hurry." This last an addition of his own.

Rutherford whirled around on him in swift anger. "What do you mean by yelling at me in that way, you confounded monkey?" he demanded. "Next time you do it I'll split your head open! Do you hear?"

"Ya-as, sar," drawled the unabashed messenger; then added, with an expostulatory inflection, "'Tain't no use gittin' mad wid me. I been down totin' words back'ards an' for'reds in dem ole shops, an' I'se 'bleeged to hiest up high, fur to top de fuss. My voice ain't come down off'n de roost yit. Dat how-come I holler."

As easily placated as aroused, Rutherford laughed, and his hand sought his vest pocket for a coin, which the grinning bit of ebony caught as the young man passed him.

As he entered the counting-room, Mr. Voss turned in his chair and addressed him at once.

"See here, Rutherford, that business I talked with you about last week is coming to a head. The contract is about closed, but the firm have asked us to send them down a man to make estimates for them as to the additional space which will be required for the new machinery, and all that sort of thing. They want to economize time and get things into satisfactory shape at once. Mr. Brainard and I have talked the matter over and decided to send you. What do you think of it?"

He looked up at the younger man with a kindly smile in his eyes. He was fond of Rutherford and proud of him besides. He had caught the chap wild, so to speak, and brought him in and stood sponsor for him, and the result had been creditable. In Voss's opinion, his *protege* was already booked for a fate beyond ordinary.

"Think it over," Voss said, still smiling. "You remember what I hinted the other day? This new factory will require a capable, energetic man, with a head on his shoulders, to get it running—to superintend for the owners, in fact. The firm know us and, privately, requested us to put them in the way of the man they wanted. We've had some correspondence, and the result is, Deane, that an offer will probably be made you when you get out there. It's pretty well a certainty."

Mr. Voss spoke with business caution, but Rutherford understood that the affair was in such shape that his own decision was the only thing requisite.

"What do you advise?"

His tone was rather that of brother deferring to brother, than employe consulting employer, and the look in his eyes matched the friendliness in those of the older man. Deane owed Mr. Voss more than he could ever repay and was too gratefully aware of the fact to let it trouble him. He simply laid against his indebtedness deep love and unswerving loyalty and so canceled it.

"That you take whatever they offer," Voss replied quickly. "It isn't the money, Deane. We can afford to pay you as much, and more, than these fel-

lows are likely to give, and you are worth it to us. But the thing is to get you on your own feet in a position of responsibility and from under my wing. I want you to get a bit more recognition than you'll ever get here where you've worked among the men. You don't belong to them any longer. By your own ability and pluck you've lifted yourself to another level, and I believe you've got it in you to lift yourself higher still. This position is in many ways a rise for you. My advice is to take it."

Rutherford held out his hand. "All right," he said seriously. "I've gone by your word ever since I quit the woods, and its led me pretty straight so far. Whatever I make of my life, Mr. Voss, it will be as much your doing as mine. You've been the sort of friend to me Jonathan was to David."

"And David became a king," laughed Mr. Voss, returning the hand-clasp heartily. "Take care you do me that much credit!"

"I'm not going to shame you at any rate, or to make you sorry you didn't leave me in Toby Blake's smithy," the young fellow declared sturdily.

Then for half an hour the two men discussed business details connected with the proposed change, Deane entering into it with an enthusiasm which showed how good a thing he realized it to be for him.

"How far is it from here?" he questioned, as he stood up to return to his logarithms.

"Winock? Oh, not far. About forty miles out on the G. & H. railway. It isn't much of a place; just the usual country village, but it's well within the confines of the best tobacco region of

Virginia and North Carolina, which is the reason these cigarette men picked on it for a location. By the way, it's in the direction of your old home. If I remember right, Tuckahoe Mountain is in full sight from the village. We passed through Winock on our way here ten years ago, but I don't suppose you noticed. When I was a young fellow I visited a good deal in that neighborhood—had a sweet-heart down there-away. It was a mighty pleasant region before the war, but I suppose it's a good deal changed now."

The proximity of the village to his native wilds pleased Rutherford. In all these years of labor, struggle and partial success, he had never gone back, nor did he intend to do so now. The old life, to him, seemed afar off and separated from his present and future as by a gulf; but, with one hideous exception, his memories of it were pleasant, kindly memories, full of quaint lights and iridescent colors. And, being a mountaineer, he had had his periodical fits of nostalgia. To have old Tuckahoe in sight would be to him as a familiar presence, which pleased and yet made no claim upon him.

Late in the afternoon he took his way up-town and entered a livery stable.

"How's my horse to-day, Dick?" he questioned, as a mulatto groom stepped forward.

"Lively as a cricket, sar," was the reply. "We-all gin her de mash jus' like you fixed it las' night, an' she chaw'd her oats right relishin' dis mornin'. 'Tain't nothin' much de matter wid her 'scusin' she ain't so young as she used to be."

Rutherford passed on to a loose-box wherein, on clean straw, stood a handsome sorrel mare, well groomed and shining like red satin. She greeted him with a murmurous whinny of affection, and continuous soft shoving with her nose and forehead, while he ran his hand over her quarters, examined her legs and assured himself that justice had been done her.

"Well, sweetheart," he said, drawing her head to his breast and fondling her as though she had been a woman, "I've got news for you to-day We're going to make a break again, we two. Don't you want to turn your nose mountain-ward once more, old horse? Don't you want to smell the woods again, to get Tuckahoe wind into your nostrils, and feel the spring of clean ground under your hoofs? Ain't you tired of city streets and city stables?" He glanced around at the appointments of the box. "You won't be so comfortable out yonder, I'm afraid, lady, and you like your little ways. Still, we'll be together, and I will do the best I can for you. We've loved each other for sixteen years, my horse, and we can't afford to part. Isn't that so?"

The red mare held her head still, with the off ear, colored like a fall maple leaf, pricked forward for his words. When he finished speaking, she pulled away a little, as though she understood him, turned her lustrous glance to his, and whinnied her answer.

CHAPTER VI.

SHAKING A CHESTNUT TREE.

JOYCE RUTHVEN stood on the lawn in the full glow of the autumn sunshine. On her head was a flapping hat of scarlet felt with a peaked crown, and in her hand a small black and white basket, of the sort which negroes make out of white-oak splits. Her blue dress, tan gloves, and a brace of russet dogs at her feet, helped out the chromatic harmony, and made her a fit center for a picture whose background was a stately cream-colored old mansion of stuccoed brick, and whose vanishing point was the violet of the far horizon.

The house was a singular pile, built in a day when neither time nor money had been an object with the Ruthvens. Despite the gnawing and nibbling the building had endured from the tooth of time, it was impressive. It consisted of a central part, large and square, with pillared portico in front, and in the rear a pretty built-in balcony with a stone balustrade, under which was a small conservatory. On either hand were wings, in themselves large enough to domicile a family, connected with the center house by brick covered ways, low and flat-roofed, and furnished on top with plank walk-ways, guarded by posts with chains linked from one to the other. The

wings had porticoes likewise, which were the objective points of the roof-walks, and on them the family were wont to have the tea-table spread in summer evenings.

The house, as well as its surroundings, showed the falling off in means incident to the changed conditions at the South. In places the stucco had pealed off, revealing the bricks, and the ornamental balustrade which enclosed the hipped roof of the center portion was broken in parts, and sagged at the corners. But it was a handsome place still, barring all defects—handsome with the glory of age, solidity and fine toning. The girl standing on the lawn before it, herself a study in color, let her glance wander from foundation to facade with loving appreciation. For upward of a century the place had cradled her race, and in her sight it was more than beautiful.

Presently her glance traveled sideways to the covered corridors and rested upon a flock of white, mauve, and slate-colored pigeons, who were busily pecking the mortar from between the old bricks, clinging to the wall with their toes and digging away with predatory beaks and much soft cooing and fluttering of lustrous, iridescent wings. When one of the marauders succeeded in dislodging an unusually big bit of mortar the rest would congratulate him and themselves, coo with delight, and apply them again to the task of demolition as though it were praiseworthy. Joyce sent her basket hurtling through the air at them, accompanied by an emphatic "shoo—shoo!" of protest. The birds flut-

tered out and away, circling off toward the big barn at the foot of the hill, on the roof of which they alighted, preened themselves and strutted coquettishly.

One of the dogs, a retriever, gamboled after the basket, caught it up by the handle, and after some coaxing restored it to its owner. .

From a side-door three children emerged, two girls of six and eight, and a boy much younger. The larger children attempted to thrust the boy back and fasten the door, holding him a prisoner inside; but his resistance was so sturdy that they were compelled to desist and content themselves with racing away from him. Both were equipped with baskets, and they seemed eager.

"Auntie Joy," they exclaimed in a tumult, as they joined her, "Edmund declares he's going too, and we don't want him. Please don't listen to him! Don't let him go."

"Why not?" the young lady demanded.

"'Cause he's too little to walk all that way. And he hasn't any shoes on, and will get stickers in his feet and holler. He'll get tired too and want us to tote him pick-a-back, and he's just as heavy as iron."

It was the elder girl who expounded; the younger stood silently acquiescent. Both were unusually pretty children.

"Come here, Edmund," Joyce called.

The little fellow just ruled against joined the group. He was a well-built, strong-limbed child of four, with honest gray eyes and a tousle of yellowish chestnut curls. His kilt was torn at one side and

flapped against his bare brown legs. In feature and expression he resembled Joyce herself strongly

"You want to go mighty bad, little man?" she questioned, her voice involuntarily softening.

The child nodded.

"All right, you shall. Auntie will look out for you. You shall carry her basket and have all the fun you want. There—there! little women!" as the other children raised a hue and cry, "you needn't bother with him. I'll carry him myself if he gets tired. It's beastly mean of you to want to leave your little brother behind anyhow."

Joyce spoke vigorously. She hated to see a child's face clouded without adequate cause, and of her brother's children the boy was the favorite. One of the little girls suggested the disastrous results likely to accrue from "stickers" again, and Joyce advanced toward the house. Catching up a bit of gravel she threw it with well-directed aim against one of the windows, which was promptly opened by a handsome, dark-haired young woman in a dressing-gown.

"What is it?" she queried.

"Edmund's socks and shoes," answered Joyce. "Throw them down to me. I'm going to take him after chestnuts with us."

"Mercy, Joyce!" remonstrated her sister-in-law, "I wouldn't. It's two miles to the chestnut woods, and he'll be sure to break down and cry. I can't spare Belinda from the baby to go along and carry him. Edmund is as heavy as lead, and if you take him you'll repent it."

"No, I won't," persisted Joyce, laughing. "He's

a stouter fellow than you think; aren't you, manny? Do look at his face, Louise! How could I leave him, when his heart's set on going? You've done your duty in protesting, so throw down his shoes. If unto me repentance cometh, so be it."

"Pray rather that the back be strengthened for the burden," smiled her sister, as she tossed out the little boots and stockings. "Every ounce of your boy will be a pound by the time you get him home again."

Joyce sat herself down on the grass and drew the child into her lap, drawing on his socks and buttoning his boots with swift fingers. While she did so the little fellow huddled his cheek up to hers and bestowed a series of rough, grateful hugs upon her.

"I'll walk all myse'f," he declared; "an' tote you' bastet, an' full it all up for you, Auntie; heapin' full."

"So you will, manikin. Auntie knows all about it; she's been boys herself long ago. Come on, young ones, all. We must hurry."

Then she called up to the lady at the window again.

"Don't worry about Edmund, sister. Fred's going to meet us in the woods, and shake a tree for us. He'll let the children ride his horse home."

"Very good," Mrs. Ruthven called back. "I was going to send Belinda to meet you in an hour or so; but if Fred will be along it's all right."

The road to the chestnut wood led along between fields and through ravines and dingles. It was fenced on one side with a picturesque rock wall, capped with broken white flint, very different from the customary stake and rail fence of the country.

There were twenty miles of it on and about the plantation, with gateways with solid stone pillars, all of it an enduring monument to the thrift and management of some old-time Ruthven. The wall was covered with lichens and rock-moss, making traceries of gray and drab against the darkness of the stones; over it, in places, masses of poison-oak, bramble-berry and Virginia creeper had tangled themselves, gay bedight with crimson, brown and yellow, like carnival maskers for the autumn's harlequinade. The road was crossed farther along by the public highway leading into the village; but here it was sequestered, and Joyce walked along, surrounded by children and dogs, in the happiest mood and secure from observation. She loved freedom, movement, the odors of field and fell, and the spring of the earth under her feet. The dogs circled about, now in front and again lagging far behind, thrusting investigating noses into crevices in the wall, lest, haply, rabbits might have secreted themselves, or ground-squirrels be seeking to invest their rubbishing affairs with mystery and concealment. The little girls danced and sung, taking many unnecessary steps, but Edmund trotted soberly and reserved his strength, mindful of the prediction which had well-nigh wrought his undoing.

Arrived at the nut wood, Joyce led her party straight to a tree in a little open, which she said always gave the first and finest chestnuts of the season. There had been frost the night before, and all the burrs, on spreading branches and lofty crown, were cleft to the heart, and showed treasure. The

children shouted with delight, and began pawing and scratching, like chickens, among the fallen leaves and sticks on the ground.

"Pigs have been here," announced Jeanie in disgust, pointing to up-turned mold and leaves. "Just look how they've rooted! They've gobbled up every chestnut the wind shook down last night. I *hate* pigs—greedy wretches!" She spoke with the acrimony of the anticipated.

Little Page stared upward with longing eyes. "There isn't a bit of wind," she complained, "not a single teenchy-weenchy blow. Just look at the chestnuts, Auntie! Don't you reckon you could hit 'em with a stick. Father does."

"I can try," Joyce assented. "I used to be a good hand to throw in my youth. Get me some sticks, bairnies, and stand from under. I may hit what I'm not aiming at."

"Father may be coming," suggested Page, dropping her basket. "I'm going back to the wall and holler for him. Pick up for me, Edmund, 'til I come back."

The coolness of the proposal staggered Edmund; he half turned, obediently, to pick up the basket, then remembered that his would-be task-mistress had done her best to cut him off from the expedition. "I s'a'n't do it!" he announced, suddenly, and carried two chestnuts he had found to his aunt, despite the longing of his little teeth to crack them.

Page sped away, scrambled up on the wall, and sent her clear treble ringing along the road in a call: "Father! father! Come on! We're waiting for you!"

Deane Rutherford, coming along the cross-road from Winock, heard her and turned aside. It seemed a lonesome, far-off place for a child to be, and he felt curious. What could any child be doing so far a-field? As he approached he caught sight of the little one on the wall, and recognized her. His sojourn at Winock, as yet, had been short, but it had covered a Sunday, which in country villages is a day of investigation and research. He had seen the child at church, and, being pretty, he had noted her; he had seen Joyce also, and had learned that the pair belonged together, in a way. He had learned also that she made her home with a married brother, who owned the family estate, and who had several children. He wondered if the young lady might chance to remember him, and told himself that it was not likely, and then discredited his own conclusion.

Page was a friendly little soul, not at all shy with strangers, and very speedily after Rutherford had ranged alongside and opened colloquy she put him in possession of the facts of the case. He dismounted at once, and fastened his horse to a swinging limb.

"I'll shake the tree for you," he said. "Your father hadn't started from the village when I left. He was talking to a lot of men on the store porch. You are Mr. Ruthven's little girl, aren't you?"

Page nodded, let him jump her down from the wall, and skipped forward by his side with elation. To have secured an assistant like this was a thing to be proud of.

Joyce had armed herself with a stout stick and stood poised for the throw; the right foot was planted, supporting the body, which rose pliant and firm from the hips; the left foot was advanced a little, the head and arm thrown backward, the eyes lifted and intent to gauge the distance. Every line and curve, the round of the side, the poise of the shoulders, the swell of the breast, the sweep of the arm, was instinct with grace and energy. As the missile flew straight, struck a well-ladened branch and brought down a shower of nuts, Rutherford had much ado to keep from applauding. The exhibition had been so pretty that it set his nerves to thrilling. He would have liked to hide himself somewhere and watch her throw at chestnuts for the balance of the afternoon.

Instead of which he came forward and re-introduced himself. Joyce recognized him with flattering promptitude, and laughingly inquired into her niece's stoppage of him on the public highway.

"She's so distracted after chestnuts that she'd halt a king on his way to coronation to shake the tree for her."

"I know exactly how she feels," Rutherford declared; "I've sat under a chestnut tree in a dead calm myself and hungered for help. She didn't halt me, however. I halted myself, and thrust my services upon her. Her plan seemed to be roosting on the wall and making the welkin ring."

"My brother was to have joined us here," Joyce explained. "He must have been detained somewhere."

Rutherford acquiesced cheerfully and proceeded to divest himself of coat and vest. He was a tall man, but the tree branched high; it took a sinuous spring and considerable scrambling to land him astride of the lowest limb. After that he went upward like a sailor, hand over hand. When the crown of the tree was reached he caught the tapering stem in his arms and shook violently; the whole shaft swayed and trembled to his movement, the twigs whipped about, the brown burrs turned over and spilled their contents, which rattled to the ground in a hard shower, making the dead leaves hop about as though galvanized, and compelling the children and dogs to caper, shout, and bark at a distance.

After ten minutes of frenzied zeal he called down to know if they had enough. All the loose nuts were out, he said, but if they would find him a pole he would thrash the burrs off.

"No, indeed!" Joyce replied; "we've more than enough. Don't take any more trouble, please. The baskets won't hold what you've shaken down now."

He descended and helped them pick up, growing merry and familiar with the children and exceedingly friendly with Joyce. When the baskets were full he loaded his pockets, and even proposed to supplement Edmund's hat with his own.

They went back to the road together and Rutherford helped them over the wall, remarking as he lifted Edmund down that the little man looked fagged, and in poor shape for the homeward tramp. His horse was gentle, he said, and proposed to give

the children a lift, observing, mendaciously, that he believed their ways were the same.

As they walked side by side, the red mare following with her back piled with children from mane to crupper, Rutherford sketched over the time since their previous meeting, telling her of his appointment as superintendent of this new industry to be started at Winock, and intimating that his sojourn in the neighborhood might be a protracted one. Joyce listened with interest, inwardly resolving to make her brother call at the earliest moment and so get this pleasant acquaintance onto an orthodox footing.

About half-way home they encountered Mr. Fred Ruthven on horseback, moderately contrite, and very explanatory. He had gotten himself ensnared by business in the village, and forgotten all about his appointment with the children until too late to keep it; but as soon as he remembered had ridden straight home, hoping that Joyce might have delayed or abandoned the expedition. His wife had pounced upon him without mercy and straightway ordered him off to deploy along the road and pick up stragglers.

He had met Rutherford some days before in the village, and shook hands amicably, albeit he appeared a trifle surprised at the terms on which he found the young man with his family.

"They seemed as chummy as though they'd made mud pies together," he declared to his wife in the privacy of their chamber. "There was a 'we twa ha' runned adoon the bra' look about them that set

me back tremendously, until Joyce explained that she'd met Rutherford last winter at Montaubon."

"So she did," Louise affirmed; "she told me about it. Uncle Charlie introduced him. He's an inventor, or mechanical genius, or something, and was connected with Brainard, Voss & Co.'s celebrated iron-works. Rutherford is a mighty good name, you know, Fred, and Uncle Charlie wouldn't have introduced a man to Joyce she oughtn't to know. You'd better call, and have him at the house in the regular way if Joyce likes him. It must be immensely interesting to know a genius."

Mr. Ruthven had his doubts, which he wisely kept to himself. His own conception of genius was that it might be self-sufficient. His wife had no misleading intention, but she had produced on his mind an impression of Rutherford vastly different from that which might have been made by the verity.

CHAPTER VII.

JOYCE'S LOVERS.

To every attractive woman there comes, sooner or later, a period when such belleship as is to be her portion appears to leaf out and blossom around her. Joyce was entering upon her heritage, with drums and banners, just about the time that Rutherford made her acquaintance, and even in her own quiet neighborhood she could boast of "lovers twain who came to woo." Heading the list was the rector of the parish, a recent widower, poor man, with a following of girl children fit to reduce him to lunacy, when the clothes which their deceased mother had provided should wear out and force him to grapple with problems more dire than election or justification. Perhaps it was the foreshadowing of extremity which made him cast about early for help. Joyce thought so, and maintained that the reverend gentlemen was driven wifeward by the instinct of self-preservation alone.

"My spiritual state was just as precarious before Mrs. Green died as it is now," she argued within herself. "And I was every bit as ignorant about the Aryan evolutions. Only it didn't seem to prey on the rector's mind as long as the little Greens had somebody to cut and make for them. If those chil-

dren's bodies didn't lay like lead on his mind I don't think my soul would."

She kept her disrespectful musings to herself, however, having some reverence for the office ecclesiastic, and a decided affection for the Winock representative of it, who was a seemly man, and had buried her father and mother, besides baptizing every one of her brother's children.

About her other adorer, a dashing young medico, who rode a black horse and sported new saddle-bags filled with dangerous professional appointments, she was more outspoken, for Dr. Hatton labored under the disadvantage of having played with her in childhood, and the additional disadvantage of being called by his Christian name without the justification of kinship.

Joyce refused to take him seriously, or believe in his affection a bit more than she did in his medicine. Of the one she affirmed, "Craige shall *never* physic me while the breath is in his father's nostrils. Why, we used to doctor the stumps in the yard together with sassafras juice and balm tea, and perform surgical operations on gapey chickens with a horsehair or a feather.

Of the other she said: "Craige Hatton is in love with me because it's hereditary in his family, like the tendency to physic and the preference for black horses. Every Hatton man born in the county for generations has courted a Ruthven woman and then happily married somebody else. It's a race peculiarity for which they are not accountable."

Mrs. Ruthven, to whom this theory of the doctor's love was expounded, turned up her nose at it.

"Fiddle-faddle!" scoffed she, "I'd like to see hereditary predilection stand against ugliness or stupidity. If you had a broken nose, or one leg shorter than the other; or even if you were good to look at, and without sense or tact, the Hatton record would be broken mighty quickly. Craige's father might have courted your aunt, and his grandfather your great-aunt, and so on back through the ages; but Craige himself wouldn't court *you*. You're a bonnie woman, Joyce, and *that's* why the men come after you."

The old Scotch word just described Joyce; at this period of her life she was "bonnie."

Rutherford certainly found her so.

He returned Ruthven's call with promptitude, and, despite the rush of business consequent to getting a new enterprise upon its legs, contrived to see a good deal of that gentleman's family. They all took to him, for underneath his acquired culture lay a homely substratum of truth and simplicity, coupled with the inherent directness of the natural born scientist. It did not take Rutherford long to discover the real nature of his feeling for Joyce, nor did he scruple to call it by its true name. He indulged in no pretty subterfuges, no fancy casts with the white-fly or scarlet ibis of "friendship;" he dropped his line into the water straight, and baited his hook with his heart.

He lavished on Joyce every attention he could think of, which did not seem to him unjustifiable;

but his courtship cost him considerable wear and tear in mind as well as in emotions. His love was fine and true enough to teach him that a woman, in wooing, must be handled like delicate machinery, not worked like raw material on an anvil. That her moods and inclinations must be studied, and his conduct adjusted thereunto with the nicety with which wheel fits into cog, or rod answers to piston. And when he cast about in his past for help in the matter there was no precedent. Love of woman had never touched his life before, and the only supreme affections heretofore experienced, friendship for Mr. Voss and love for his red mare, did not prove suggestive.

His rivals bothered him also, and made him low in his mind. He could not divine Joyce's indifference to both; for she took care not to make it apparent before him, giving him rather the impression that each held an exalted post in her estimation. The spiritual effulgence which appeared to surround the rector, in particular, struck terror to his soul. Well he remembered how in his youth the fattest chickens, the headiest cider, the biggest sweet potatoes and the most toothsome home-made preserves were invariably saved for the preacher—how the women would preen themselves and flutter at clerical approach, and how the advent of a new circuit-rider would be followed by access of feminine spiritual anxiety. Women and preachers—the very words appeared to sidle together, like horses well-matched and fit to pull in double-harness. And if this were true of ordinary circuit-riders, men who

stood up on plain platforms and preached in their everyday clothes, how doubled and twisted must be its verity when applied to a white-handed gentleman who bedecked himself in vestments, occupied an ecclesiastical chair, held forth above the crimson or purple cushions of a reading-desk, and encouraged musical response in his service? The odors of the sanctuary became offensive in Deane's nostrils; he grew non-conformist in thought, and while he frequented the church with a regularity equaled only by the rector's, he did so in a carping spirit.

The doctor's aspirations, while they inspired equal reprobation, did not occasion him half so much trepidation. The man of medicine stood on his own feet, so to speak, and had only mundane backing. Still they were good feet to stand on, and at times when, for reasons only to be appreciated by lovers, Deane was serving a term in the valley of humiliation, he was fain to admit it. As in emotional extremities a man's instinct unconsciously reverts to his past experience for guidance, in considering this rival also, Deane went back to the only portion of his own life in which women had been prominent, and the result was well-nigh as disconcerting in the one case as the other. He minded well how the matrons and maids used to revel in discussions of sickness and symptoms, how they had thrilled over remedies, and walked miles to exchange receipts for making noxious brews and decoctions; how they gloried in experiment, and regarded avidly the materiæ systole and diastole; how they hung on the doctor's nod and treated him like a fetich of power.

In his love-begotten humility it seemed to Deane that no man in the world had ever had arrayed against him so formidable a team. With the strongholds of theology and medicine manned there seemed no place for him about Joyce save on the dead level of common-place generality.

"What the devil can I do?" he demanded savagely of himself. "Green blazes the way to heaven for her soul, and Hatton stands by to cooper up her body, so she gets looked after, hive, comb and honey. How's a fellow like me going to please a woman? She don't want machinery—which is all I can make—nor to hear me talk about attraction, cohesion, or the conservation of force. There isn't anything unknowable about mechanical science. I can't fire her imagination with wheels and thumb-screws divorced from suffering humanity and religious persecution. I might perfect my inventions, make a big name and reputation, and lay all at her feet perhaps. But that would take time, and a mind at peace with itself, neither of which I've got. I've got to hustle in this matter or I'll be left, and my mind is all scattered about now-a-days, like a covey of birds that's been shot into."

It seemed worse scattered than ever when, one afternoon just before Christmas, he beheld Joyce in procession with five little Greens moving down on the church, like Birnam wood upon Dunsinane, with branches of yew, arbor-vitæ, and holly.

He was in one of the village stores when she passed, talking with a knot of men and making purchases of hardware. And when one of the group, a

harmless fellow in intention and consequently pernicious in speech, essayed inconsequent and ill-constructed witticisms anent "ever-*greens*" and "bowers of domestic bliss," he allowed his temper to get the better of him so far as to cause him to drop a small crow-bar he held in such fashion that the point of it smote the floor at an angle which necessitated its gravitating directly onto the toes of the jester, the howl of whose anguish soothed his perturbation somewhat, and brought balm to his spirit.

The joker hopped miserably about with his foot in his hand and declined to accept any apology whatever, acrimoniously giving it as his opinion that a fellow "so damned slack-fisted that he couldn't hold things, oughtn't to handle 'em." He scowled upon his neighbors too, and fiercely rebuked such as indulged in the unseemliness of laughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCOTCH VALENTINE.

Mr. Voss was a gentleman of old-fashioned tastes in literature, and in guiding his protege's reading, apart from the professional grind, had early introduced him to a school of romancers scarcely appreciated by the youth of the present generation. The timbre of Rutherford's mind being what it was, and his early training among simple conditions, the stories of a past generation suited him rarely. He reveled in the sentiment, the devotion, the subordination of self to ideals which they portrayed, and was in sympathy with the action and stir, and even with the blows and the roughness.

Casting about in his mind for some still untried method of honoring his lady, recollection of the armorer's Valentine to the Fair Maid of Perth came to him, and he craftily determined to score one against his rivals by preparing a similar gift for Joyce. The ruby heart he would secure from a New York lapidary, but the casket he would fashion himself, substituting silver for the fine steel which the armorer had used, as being more malleable and better adapted to his less skillful smithscraft. He would have the token conveyed to her anonymously and trust to her power of divination for informing her whence it had come.

The idea pleased him immensely and he glorified himself, feeling confident that nothing so clever and suggestive would occur to those dullards, his rivals, who were given over utterly to nineteenth century methods.

Joyce's penetration did justice to Rutherford's trust in it. She guessed intuitively the donor of the beautiful bauble which came to her by post on St. Valentine's day. She happened to be alone when the mail-bag was handed in by the small African whose duty it was to fetch the mail from the village, and she sorted out her own from the family letters, and repaired with them to her own room.

It was a quaint old room, and of late Joyce had fallen into the way of spending a good deal of her time in it, courting solitude as some natures do when mysteriously quickening to change. It was a pretty room, too, with a curtained alcove to one side, wherein stood the toilet accessories, a ceiling wondrous high-pitched, and a chimney that jutted out, giving deep recesses on either hand which had been made into closets, whose lower sections would have made excellent hiding-places for tramps with house-breaking proclivities, and whose shelves might only be reached at risk of life and limb.

The mantel was of white marble, its front carven into medallions and cherubs' faces set between wings, and its shelf supported by slender Corinthian columns, set well forward on the hearth, and giving to the structure the aspect of a portico to a temple. An open fire burned under it and made a center of brightness and attraction to the room. In a low

rocking-chair, Joyce sat and dreamed dreams. She had examined and cast aside most of her mail, but in her lap lay folds of soft paper, an open box half-filled with pink cotton and a purse of fine silver links, cunningly wrought and as flexible as a glove. Its clasp was an arrow, on the shaft of which were graven Greek characters which Joyce had it borne in upon her consciousness must mean love and loyalty. Perhaps her linguistic perception was sharpened by the object lesson of the ruby heart, which lay in her palm glowing and scintillating wherever the light struck it, and burning with a glorious and radiant fire. It told its own story plainly enough, warming her imagination with its beauty and suggesting thoughts and fancies that made her tremble and quiver. She wondered why it had been sent to her unset, and whether it had been intended simply as a token? On the whole she thought this probable, and instantly decided to keep the secret of its possession sacred with her own soul until time should bring about other disclosures. She got out her work-basket and fashioned a receptacle of chamois-skin, on which she copied the Greek text in embroidery of silk. Into this she put the heart-shaped jewel, securing it with a narrow ribbon of blue, drawn tight, but left with a long loop.

The silver purse she locked away in her desk—what she did with the heart, let other maidens answer.

Her next meeting with Rutherford was in church with people around them and the soft pulsings of the organ filling the air and lifting, be it hoped, all

souls and desires toward heaven. Joyce led the little choir, and when she stood up to sing Rutherford turned in his place and looked at her. For an instant the hazel eyes held the brown, questioningly, assertively, and then the woman's lashes drooped as though to meet and shadow the crimson flood which surged from her heart to her cheeks. The man rose quietly and went out from among the people to get into some still place and think.

He saddled the red mare and rode out into the country, turning his face instinctively towards Tuckahoe Mountain and letting the animal choose her own gait. Without a spoken word his story had been told, and he must await now some sign from her.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM OFF'N TUCKAHOE.

"JOYCE, I wish you'd come and look at Edmund," Mrs. Ruthven called, sending her voice anxiously along the passage from the nursery door.

Joyce was dusting and setting things to rights in the parlor, one of her customary after breakfast duties. She responded at once.

"What is it?"

"Edmund. Do come and look at him. I'm afraid it's something worse than a cold or indigestion. It looks more serious."

As soon as she looked at the child, Joyce shared this opinion.

"How long has he been like this?" she questioned.

"Not long. He was sickish, once or twice, during the night, complained of his head and his throat and was restless. I gave him the usual remedies for nausea and headache, and this morning I would not let Belinda wake him up. Fred thought it was indigestion, and so did I at first. But I don't now. Just feel how hot his head is, and his hands are really parched."

The little fellow lay supine, his limbs relaxed, his curly head thrown backward and his dry lips parted.

His breath was hurried, his temples beat, and his condition suggested stupor rather than sleep. Joyce laid her hand on his forehead and then on his wrist.

"Count his pulse, Louise," she whispered, and gave place.

Mrs. Ruthven's lips moved in the count, the expression of anxiety on her face deepening to alarm as the number went up and up. A negro girl, who had been hushing an infant to sleep in the next room, laid her charge in the cradle and came into the nursery, carefully closing the door of communication between the two rooms. The larger children were at play in the yard.

Belinda came to the bedside, looked down at the little boy and, obedient to the instinct of her race, proceeded to "sit down on the ground" with them after the manner of Bildad, Eliphaz and the man of Naam.

"Dar's a mighty heap o' scarlet fever gwine 'bout," she dismally announced. "Heap o' de Winock chil'en, colored an' white, is down wid it. It's spreadin' right peart, too. Dem little Woodwrights over in de hollow all got it."

She jerked her head sideways to indicate a settlement of poor whites three miles away.

The ladies looked panic-stricken.

"Who told you?" Joyce queried in consternation.

"Unk 'Lige. He fetched de word las' night, an' 'lowed we-all better keep we-all's chil'en at home mighty close, bein' as 'twas a bad sort an' pow'ful ketchin'."

Mrs. Ruthven wrung her hands.

"Joyce, do you think he has it?" she whispered, with fear in her eyes.

Joyce was a helpful woman, high-mettled and swift in decision and action. She was a woman for emergencies, likewise, for her wits never scattered, and she appeared to fall into the readiest methods by instinct, as it were. She soothed her sister at once, albeit the occasion seemed to her grave.

"Perhaps not, dear. He hasn't been anywhere, or seen any other children for days. He's sick, and the doctor must be sent for, but I wouldn't frighten myself before it's necessary. Where's Fred?"

"Gone over to the stone-quarry across the river, and he won't be back until dinner-time. He had to see a lot of people on business."

"And the men?"

This question was put to Belinda, who true to her role promptly made them aware that in mankind, as represented on the plantation, there was no hope.

"Unk 'Lige had gone to mill an' tooken Torm wid him," and the balance of the hands were over in the ten-acre lot seeding wheat. Old Dr. Hatton was ill also, confined to his room and his chair with gout. "Unk 'Lige" had told her.

"Gracious me, Belinda!" Joyce exclaimed impatiently, "will you never be done piling on the agony? You're worse than an owl on the roof, or a dog howling under the windows! Don't fret, Louise! I'm going for Craige. Rebel is in the stable and I can saddle him myself. Have the children moved to my side of the house, and quarantine until we find out what's the matter. I'll get Craige if I have

to chase him all over the county, and ride like the wild huntsman."

In spite of maternal solicitude and preoccupation, Mrs. Ruthven followed Joyce to the door with a protest.

"You've never ridden Rebel before, Joyce, and I'm afraid for you. He might throw you. Fred says he's dangerous."

But Joyce paid no heed. She did not stop to change her dress for a habit, or get a hat. A little cap of Edmund's lay on the hall table and she caught it up as she passed. The saddle-room was down next to the stable and the door of it was never locked. Rebel, a big blood-bay with a vicious eye and nostrils that flared with every breath, stood in his stall. As though to belie his unamiable reputation he allowed himself to be saddled and mounted without protest. He bore his rider gallantly too, covering the ground with grand space-devouring strides, and taking his fences like a bird, for Joyce preferred to take no risks with his temper by forcing him to maneuver with gates. She rode straight to the village, knowing Craige Hatton's methodical habits and confident that, even if he should be out, his whereabouts might be learned from the directions on his office slate. Her mind was filled with anxiety, and with thoughts of the child.

Young Dr. Hatton's office was in a shabby little frame building next to the village tavern, from which it was separated by six feet of space and a stout paling fence, which angled with a front fence on the street. The tavern was a commodious build-

ing with a porch extending all along its front, which was the rendezvous of all men who found their neighbors' affairs more interesting than their own.

A group of three were congregated there in the sunshine, as Joyce rode up. Two sat on chairs with their heels up, and the third perched on the railing with his back to the street. Taking it for granted that the trio were village men and well known to her, Joyce sent her voice across to them in instant demand of assistance.

"My horse won't stand," she called, "and I've come for the doctor. Will one of you kindly see if he's in his office for me? Or, if he isn't, bring me out his slate."

The men in chairs brought these useful articles down on all fours with a clatter, and substituted their elbows for their heels on the railing. The man who perched, swung himself round on his center of gravity, dropped to the ground outside of the porch and came forward. As he approached, Joyce could see that he was a roughly clad fellow, with a keen, strongly featured face and a straggling beard of tawny chestnut. He was a stranger to her, but he seemed civil enough and touched his weather-beaten hat as he inquired what it might be that she wanted. Joyce repeated her statement, supplementing her request with a few directions. The man, being a stranger, was of course unfamiliar with the doctor's habits.

While he went on her quest, she glanced cursorily at the other two men, with the thought in her mind

that they might be workmen from the new factory now nearing completion just outside of the village. Her brother had said that many new people would be moving in now that the works were getting fairly under-way. From where she sat she could see the long slate-covered roof of one of the huge buildings wherein Rutherford spent most of his days. She wondered if he were there now, and then, catching a scrap of conversation between a couple of passing workmen, learned that he had gone up to Montaubon the day before to see Brainard, Voss & Co. about the shipment of machinery for the new works. The men passed on, and her horse fidgeted so that she could not hear when Rutherford was expected to return.

Dr. Hatton was out—over at his father's, the slate stated. Her messenger held it up for her inspection from the inside of the fence, for Rebel, teased by the delay, was beginning to show the whites of his eyes and to snatch at his bit in a way which discouraged approach.

As she acknowledged his courtesy, Joyce felt moved to inquire of this stranger whether or not he worked at Mr. Rutherford's factory.

The man shook his head.

"I knows Deane Rutherford well enough," he declared. "Leastways I used to know him risin' ten ye'r ago. But I ain't never worked fur him none. Ther boot's been on t'other leg. I come from off'n Tuckahoe," nodding in the direction of the mountain. "I've got a shop up thar an' does blacksmithin' and craps. T'other fellows craps alto-

gether. We-all come over here to look aroun', hearin' Rutherford hed done so well," he smiled, showing tobacco-stained teeth.

Joyce repeated her thanks and rode off. She knew that Rutherford's beginnings had been humble; he had described them to her, taking pride, as a man should, in the way he had pulled away from them. Joyce cared little about such matters. Many families of Virginia had fallen into poverty, gone down in the trough of the wave and come up again. Rutherford was coming up, and as the name, to her ear, seemed to stand for itself, she had simply listened to that which she was told and taken things at *prima facie* value.

And just now her thoughts were preoccupied by anxiety.

At the turn of the road, where it quitted the village, she encountered Dr. Craige Hatton returning to his office. He listened to her story, but appeared considerably more disturbed by seeing her mounted on Rebel than he was by her representation of Edmund's condition. He would return with her at once, he said, but first she must consent to exchange horses with him. It curdled his blood to see her on that ill-conditioned brute.

CHAPTER X.

JIM TROTTER'S TIGHT PLACE.

LITTLE EDMUND'S disease proved itself to be scarlet fever, and Dr. Craige Hatton assumed direction of the household at once, giving orders, superintending arrangements and establishing a quarantine. Mrs. Ruthven's first terrified impulse was to bundle Joyce and the other three children out of the house and the neighborhood in flight from the wrath to come, but this Dr. Hatton would not permit. The disease was epidemic, he said, and the other children had already been as much exposed to the infection as Edmund had. The baby also was still dependent on her mother, and it would be a risk to deprive her of her natural food. There would be no necessity for anything more than strict sanitary precautions.

In his decision Joyce backed up the doctor with energy. She did not want to go away, unless the necessity should be positive. Her love for the boy held her as with fetters of steel, and she felt that it would almost break her heart to be banished from his bedside. To that which she loved Joyce was wedded body and soul. Craige's ultimatum therefore contented her, and for the first time in her life she felt grateful to him. She even busied herself to

plant and cultivate confidence in his professional skill.

"Craige was always a bright boy," she admitted to her sister. "And his father says he thoroughly understands his business. I don't think dear, honest old Dr. Hatton would vouch even for Craige if he wasn't sure of him."

"Of course he wouldn't," Louise assented. "You've just let yourself get in the habit of belittling Craige because he played with you, and is only three days older than you are. It's horridly unjust and I always said so. I'd rather have the old doctor because he's most experienced; but as I can't get him, I'm *thankful* for Craige. He's a good fellow and clever. I'm *sure* he will do everything in the power of man for Edmund."

Joyce was glad to be reinforced by such confidence. Underneath all her surface self-control she was alarmed and nervous, and Dr. Hatton was neither—a fact which speedily impressed itself upon her and stiffened her courage. It stimulates a woman to feel that a man can take an emergency into his hands and regulate it.

Dr. Hatton himself would have been more, or less, than human not to have secretly exulted a little in the opportunity to pose before his sweetheart and compel her admiration and respect. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good.

"Rutherford's business at Montaubon did not occupy him many hours, so that he returned to Winock in the afternoon of the day following the one on which he had left it. He went from the

station to the factory direct, and so missed hearing the comment which was elicited by Joyce's visit to the village. He had brought her a gift of flowers and fruit from the city, which he despatched by a messenger immediately on his arrival. In response he received a little note from Joyce. She thanked him with sweet cordiality for his thought of her, and then told him of Edmund's illness, and that the disease being contagious it would be necessary to quarantine. Friends must not come to the house, she said; it might be dangerous for them.

Rutherford put the note into the inside pocket of his vest without a thought of what might be the consequences. He would ride out to Manitoba, as the Ruthven plantation was called, in the morning. He wished to express sympathy and proffer services in person. He wished also to discover, if possible, just how much danger for Joyce was involved in this happening. Since that look into her eyes the previous Sunday he had unconsciously begun to arrogate to himself rights; to feel that power of interference and dictation in her affairs, in some sort, was already his. He did not define the feeling to himself; he only involuntarily acted upon it. Yes, he would ride out to Manitoba the following day. Joyce must be made to feel that he stood at her side, anxious for and with her.

Man proposes readily enough, making plans as unto him seemeth good, and taking small account of aught save the present and future. Unwitting is he that behind his elbow, sardonic of countenance, stands ever some deed of his past, ready to admin-

ister a reminiscent jog which will send his hand fatefully to some knight or pawn on the board which has stood so long time idle as, apparently, to have lost significance in the game. The touch once renewed, and presto! in an instant all is changed; the forgotten piece leaps supremely into prominence, and on its manipulation, the player feels, hangs the fate of all things.

The late mail brought letters which kept Rutherford busy until nearly dark. When it got too dark to write, he pushed his papers away and leaned back in his chair to indulge in ten minutes' castle-building ere he should lock up the place and betake himself to his supper and his bed. The electric lights had not been put into the building yet, for it was still far from completion, but there were lamps, filled and trimmed, in a press in the corner, ready to hand when Rutherford should choose to bestir himself.

The sun had set clear, with a crimson aftermath, which banded the horizon and glowed upward, resplendent as forest trees when the frost has touched them to color. Rutherford faced the window and watched the light die down and fade through the chromatic scale from crimson to violet behind the summit of Tuckahoe Mountain.

His mood was happy and hopeful, for to all seeming it was well with him. As a running accompaniment to his thoughts and plans he whistled, *sotto voce*, a rollicking old tune which Jim Trotter had been wont to pick on his banjo, when the forge-fire had smoldered down to embers under its sooty hood and the men sat in their shirt-sleeves outside,

and watched the daylight draw away and disappear behind Tuckahoe as he was watching it now. His thought was not of the past and his music was involuntary, a mere surface renewal of sequence, with an, as yet, unrecognized significance. He was thinking of Joyce, and also of an invention over which his brain had been straining its powers for years, and which, in one of its parts, had heretofore defied him to get it into working order. Love quickens all things spiritual to germination, so that with the introduction of its force into his nature Rutherford's intellect, as well as his heart, arose as a giant refreshed with wine, and girded itself for conquest. The evening before, as he quitted the Machine-and-Iron-Works, after his talk with Mr. Voss, he had turned in through the gateway, under whose dingy arch he had first beheld Joyce, and made his way to the shops for a word and a joke with his old confreres. One of the workmen had called his attention to a queer breakage of one of the machines, and asked his opinion about it. Rutherford had become interested and examined into the matter minutely, and while he was doing so his own mechanical difficulty cracked its calyx and definitely budded.

There and then he had taken out his pencil, and in default of a tablet jotted his thought on the linen of his shirt-cuff, as other men have done amid thrills of excitement. This idea, practically worked out and applied to his model, would perfect a machine which would ease the labor of thousands, and bring to its inventor both honor and emolument.

Who then could say that Joyce Ruthven would demean herself by marriage with him? Being a Virginian, none knew better than Rutherford how strong is the traditional pride of families; and in particular he was well aware that Fred Ruthven, at least, assumed quietly that the human race had flowered in the family of Ruthven.

Rutherford did not underrate the force of tradition and association, or the credit of respectable fore-bears; all that was an enormous help to a man in his start; but after the start it was the force of the man himself that told. In the battle in which each stands, so to speak, on his own legs and fights for his own hand it is individual prowess which tells. Rutherford was too manly and self-respecting a man to believe any good too high for his aspiration simply because his start had been from the ground. Then, too, he knew that of all democrats love is the most consistent.

His thoughts rattled on to the swing of his melody, which had unconsciously increased in volume and trilled out with a joviality which would have done honor to Jim Trotter himself. In fancy he was receiving compliments and commendations from big-wigs at home and abroad, and engineering his love affair to a white satin and orange-flower termination, when he was startled by the sudden darkening of the window in front of him by a man's head and shoulders. In the semi-obscurity he could not recognize the face looking in at him, and rose hastily to strike a light, conscious of the provoked, taken-at-advantage feeling which always comes to a person

covertly regarded. When he turned back to the window the face was gone, and he heard footsteps passing onward to the factory door. One of the hands, no doubt, trying to discover whether or not the office was still open. He dismissed the incident as unimportant, but it had put all his fancies to flight, so he busied himself straightening up his desk and getting ready for leaving.

The footsteps advanced along the entrance passage, and the office door was fumbled with, as by an unfamiliar hand, and then opened. Rutherford turned, as a tall, roughly clad mountaineer with a tawny chestnut beard entered, and uttered an exclamation of surprise. Toby Blake laughed and came forward with hand extended.

"Howdy, Deane! Howdy!" he said with exuberant cordiality. "We-all come over to see you, bein as we-all was in ther neighborhood, projeckin' an' dealin'."

"Who is we-all?" questioned Rutherford, accepting the blacksmith's brawny fist in the spirit in which it was offered, and genuinely glad to see him again.

Himself and two others—Nathan Clark and 'Bijah Wheelwright, Blake explained. Deane remembered them of course, 'Bijah and Nat; they had been boys along with him up on the mountain.

Rutherford remembered 'Bijah and Nat distinctly and said so. And when he learned further that the original destination of the mountaineers had been the village wherein was situated the court-house of Tuckahoe County, and that, chancing to hear of his

proximity, these old friends had tramped twenty miles farther to see him, he was distinctly gratified. He made Toby feel welcome and at home at once, establishing him in the best chair the office afforded and plying him with questions about home, the people there, their doings and happenings.

Blake was gratified in his turn. When the stylish, prosperous get-up of his whilom apprentice first clearly revealed itself to his vision he had, for an instant, felt flustered and half-regretful of coming. Deane might not be glad to see them—might "feel his oats" too much to care about renewing old associations. Underneath his cordiality he had been prepared to be touchy, and resentful of anything like condescension. And here was Deane sitting on the edge of his table (while he—Toby—occupied the chair of state) and taking as much interest in Judith-Ann Kimball's "weddin' infa'r," and the champion "shuckin' match over to Backwater Cove" as though he were still a grimy-fisted youngster sitting in his shirt sleeves on an up-turned tub in the smithy yard.

Ensnared by Dean's simplicity, the blacksmith's opinion waxed warm and glowing, like his own forge-fire when there is a likely hand at the bellows. He mentally resolved that Deane Rutherford, "take him which-er-way you will, was straight grained timber, 'thout'n nary frost-rift, nor wind-shook place in him."

An opinion destined to stand Deane in good stead before long.

When the neighborhood had been pretty well

gossiped over, Rutherford chanced to put a casual question as to what might have brought the men down to the Court-House village, in the very marrow of the plowing season, when Circuit Court would not be in session for a month yet. In his day the blacksmith, not being a litigious man, had bothered himself mighty little about ordinary County Court days. Deane hoped that none of his old acquaintances was in trouble.

Then he learned that Jim Trotter, the man of banjo notoriety, was in "a most tremenjeous tight place"—had in fact been jailed on a pretty serious charge. The neighborhood, as is customary when a man gets into trouble, held itself critically aloof, thrilled with curiosity and interest and moved copiously to speech; but in action supine and quite willing that Jim should manage his crisis by himself. In the vernacular, "T'others mostly shabbed off, an' sot back watchin' which-er-way the cat was gwine to jump," but Blake could not do that way. Jim's wife was own cousin to the blacksmith's wife, and the women had been raised together like sisters down in the Cove and "set sto'" by one another. When Blake's baby died it had been in Lelia Trotter's arms, and she had shrouded and prepared the tiny corpse for burial. And when Trotter's daughter got married Nannie Blake had "waited on" her, and the entire Blake family had been taken into confidence and consultation about the "infa'r" and other matters long before the rest of the district. In all their simple happenings of joy or grief the women had stuck by one another, and even when

ten years before Jim had blossomed suddenly into prosperity and paid off the mortgage on his land and set up a saw-mill, Jim's wife had not allowed increased estate to sever her from her old friend. Therefore when trouble of the most direful had overtaken Jim, the very first of all the community to rally to the support of the house of Trotter was naturally the house of Blake.

In his secret soul the blacksmith had a poor opinion of Jim himself, holding him to be "most too *de*stracted arter money to be much o' a man"; but his fealty to Trotter's womenkind was stanch and unimpeachable. Under the influence of it he had taken advantage of a proposition of Nat's and 'Bijah's to accompany them down to the village "fur a projeck, an' a mite o' dealin'." He would visit his old neighbor in prison and find out how he was taking matters, and also, if possible, get at the rights of the thing at first hand.

"Thar ain't nobody gwine to take a man's part as squar' an' satisfactory as what he do hisse'f," Blake observed. "Not even his wife can't do it, fur a 'ooman gits to cryin' or quar'lin', an' never sees nothin' reasonable 'long o' wantin' to slaughter ther world for interruptin' what they air gi'n over to lovin'. But er man's dif'ent. He kin hold a can'le up to 'stenuatin' sarkumstences, so as a body kin make shift mostly to see 'em. An' thar's allus 'stenuatin' sarkumstences. Thet's ther law an' ther gospel. An' even if some of 'em is lies it don't make much dif'ence—they air apt to be merciful lies whenst a man tells 'em fur hisse'f."

Blake smiled tolerantly.

"What's he charged with? Moon-shining?" Rutherford questioned.

He remembered of old the perennial disagreement between the government and the hill-dwellers as to the use to be made of surplus field and orchard stuff; and the tenacity with which the latter clung to the right they fancied they had to do what they would with their own regardless of public consequences. Jim, doubtless, had been bucking against the revenue.

Blake's response to his question took him between the eyes, like a blow, and brought him up all standing.

"'Tain't fur moon-shinin', nor no foolishness o' thet sort Jim hev been jailed," the blacksmith explained. "'Twouldn't nary man on the mountain shabbed off from Jim fur lockin' horns with ther revenue. Some laws air good enough, but ther law agin 'stillin' your own truck air damned meddlesome, an' 'twouldn't no person er gone back on Jim fur dodgin' it. This here matter air more serious. Jeemes Trotter hev been arrested an' jailed fur the willful murder, robbery an' burnin' o' Wolfe Ranke, the "blue-gum" whar we-all 'lowed pe'ished by fire, accidental, ten ye'r ago on Tuckahoe Mountain."

CHAPTER XI.

RANKE'S "HA'RNT."

DEANE took a turn about the room, apparently arranging matters for closing the office. His brain was in a whirl, and his pulses beat until it seemed to him that there were so many trip-hammers going in different parts of his body; but he kept his manner quiet and self-contained by instinct.

"What does Jim say about it himself?" he questioned, after a moment.

Toby laughed in derision.

"That he never done it, inco'se," he retorted. "What else? You don't look fur a man to plead guilty on a charge like that fu'st pop, does you? You'll git disapp'inted if you does. Murder's bad; but robbery an' arson on a corpse air a damned sight wuss. Slaughterin' a man in a fight an' a tantrum air allowable, bekase a fellow stands to git what he don't give. To be kilt if he don't kill. That's even an' reg'lar. But this here indictment sets for'red thet Jeemes Trotter kilt Wolfe Ranke fust, then stole what he had, an' *then* bu'nt up his dead an' defenseless body to kiver his own tracks. To my nose that air a stinkin' charge. An' inco'se Jim swar s he never done it."

Rutherford dropped into a chair, and for many moments kept silence. He was going over the past

and trying to get a grasp on it. He remembered well enough the consternation with which the news of the burning of Ranke's cabin had been received at the smithy the morning of his own departure from the hills, and how the importance of his going had been dwarfed by this other thing. The word had been brought by a couple of hunters who lived in another cabin, across the river from Ranke's and out of range of aught save what is called "smoke-sight" by country folks. That is, on clear days, and with green or wet wood on the fires, the occupants of one cabin could behold the smoke rise from the chimney of the other, all else being invisible.

These men, kept at home by the storm, had noticed along about dusk considerable smoke over at Ranke's, and later, when darkness made the glow perceptible in spite of the stuff falling between, they had seen a red flare lying against the sky in that direction which looked as though it might mean mischief. They had tried to go to the rescue, but could not get across the river, which was in freshet, and running logs and water at the rate of many miles an hour. By day-break, however, the weather had cleared and the water fallen sufficiently to admit of their crossing by making a detour. They had gone straight to the clearing filled with excitement and curiosity as to what might have happened. The cabin was a heap of charred fragments and ashes, which still smoldered in spots, and the "blue-gum" was nowhere to be found. They had examined the hen-houses, the stable and the corn-crib, which constituted the out-buildings, but with

no result. Then they had hunted up a shovel and hoe and excavated a bit among the charred rubbish. In the corner where Ranke's bed had stood, they had come speedily on blackened bones and ashes, which they vowed had a different look from that which lay around. To them it seemed evident that Ranke had been drunk and asleep at the time of the catastrophe.

The matter had made a great flutter and talk at the smithy, and even the party of gentlemen had been interested and curious. It had not delayed their departure, however, which took place at the hour previously arranged. He—Deane—had come away with them and left it all behind. More than ten years had passed since that morning, and now here was the hideous thing confronting him again.

The blacksmith went on talking and Rutherford appeared to listen, but did not; the words fell dully on his ears and conveyed no meaning to his brain. Some malevolent thing seemed to have stolen up on him from behind and dealt him a stupefying blow. He could not couple his past to his present with readiness.

After a bit he pulled himself together and spoke. "What fastened this accusation on Jim?" he demanded. "How'd he get mixed up in the business, after ten years?"

"He war mixed up in it somehow at the time," Toby pertinently replied. "Thet much we'll have to 'gree to allow, I reckon. It's findin' out just how little, or how much, he war mixed that is botherin' me. Jim knows more'n he let on to we-all. We an'

t'other boys sensed that frum the start-out. Jim knows, even if he didn't do."

"How much do you know?" Rutherford queried, his tone even and impassive.

Divested of all unnecessary circumlocution the story Blake told was substantially this:

After the departure of the down-country bound party, the blacksmith, accompanied by the two hunters, made a circuit of the neighborhood, spreading the news far and wide A posse of citizens collected and repaired to Ranke's clearing, headed by Simon Trueheart, the store-keeper, who was a justice of the peace. They examined the premises and commented freely, and when their curiosity was satisfied, collected all the bones they could find and held an inquest over them. Witness there was none save the two hunters, who testified as to the time when they first noticed the fire, so it was speedily decided that Ranke had come to his death by burning, the origin of which was unknown, although, probably, due to some carelessness of the "blue-gum" himself. They further decided that as the fire occurred before bed-time, and Ranke had apparently made no effort to save himself, he must have died under the influence of liquor. Then they dug a hole under a big walnut tree in the yard, and wrapping the bones in a horse-blanket, decently buried them.

They also administered on his estate. The chickens, cow and residue of corn left in the crib was attached at once by the store-keeper, who showed in justification of his proceeding an account on his

books against Ranke. Other stock there was none. The "blue-gum" kept few animals, being constitutionally lazy and averse to the care of them. He usually had a horse of a superior sort, for he was given to swift journeyings, hither and yon; but for three weeks before his death his stable had been empty. He had sold the iron-gray he had ridden for two years, alleging that the animal had become dull and too slow for him. Everybody knew he was in a light blaze of desire for Deane Rutherford's red mare, and that he had offered the boy a good price for her. The mare was nearly thoroughbred, and like the pulse of his heart to Deane, so nobody wondered that there had been no sale.

About two weeks after the burning, the store-keeper sent a notice of Ranke's death down to the county town by a horse-trader who was trafficking through the country, but whether it ever got into print no man upon the mountains could tell, for they depended still upon oral communication, and even the store-keeper, to whom printed language was open, only saw a newspaper now and then. Whether the notice went to the public or not it was barren of results, and as far as outside inquiry or interest went Ranke might have been the sole survivor of an extinct race. Even the bit of land went without a claimant, and as no squatter cared to erect another cabin on the old site, or to pay taxes on property he could not get a title to, the clearing was deserted and left to the tenantry of beasts and birds.

Nobody noticed as significant at the time that

Jim Trotter took no part in the proceedings. Nor, when a short time after the burning, Jim lifted the mortgage on his farm and went into partnership with Wilkins Peters in a saw-mill, did either event connect itself in the bucolic mind with the defunct "blue-gum." Trotter gave it out that an old aunt over in North Carolina had departed to the land of the blessed, leaving behind her a well-filled stocking or two, and they believed him. Why not? Everybody knew that Trotter's mother had come from the old North State, where she doubtless had kindred galore. And relatives, even relatives with golden stockings, must depart from them to greater glory sometimes.

The years died one after another, but the memory of Wolfe Ranke died not with them. On the contrary it flourished and battened on the public. His place might know him no more in the flesh; but in the spirit—ah! that was another matter, and one which made the mountaineers glance over their shoulders and move their legs nimbly whenever twilight overtook them in the ill-omened neighborhood of the clearing. Ranke's "har'nt" walked

How the impression originated none among the ignorant and superstitious could say; probably it was the *post mortem* working of the dread and aversion which had surrounded the "blue-gum" in life. It took definite shape one evening at Trueheart's store about a year after the conflagration. A knot of loungers were congregated there as usual, gossiping and verbally regulating the neighborhood. It was along about the edge of dark and the seance about

to adjourn when Jim Trotter tumbled in among them in a livid sweat of terror. His hair bristled, his teeth chattered, and his breeches were in tatters from the briers and undergrowth he had leaped through in a tumultuous scramble down the mountain-side. It took three stiff drinks and some adroit humoring to brace Jim up to disclosure, but it came out at last in a rush of nervous excitement.

He had been across to visit the hunters in their cabin on the far bluff, and by reason of pleasure in their society had overstaid his time, so that the sun was pretty well down when he started home. Without thought in the matter he had taken the short-cut across the ford, up the incline to Ranke's clearing and so on to the wood road. He had not been thinking of ghosts, or of Ranke, or anything "onnat'al," and he was not afraid. The sun had dropped behind the hills, but it was light yet—plain daylight, although softly shadowed by evening. He had come up the path, his crop-eared dog gamboling ahead, and gotten one leg over the fence when the dog "fa'rly hiested creation" with the lonesomest, scaredest howl that ever canine uttered. Jim had looked about hurriedly, not knowing what to make of it, and thinking that a rattle-snake had struck the dog, who was scudding across the clearing sideways, with his tail tucked and his head twisted backward, as though driven before a hard wind. He was so flustered it took him a full second to remember that this was not rattle-snake season, and by that time his own eyes had encountered a sight which made his blood curdle and turn backward.

There, among the ashes and *debris* where the cabin had stood, as plainly as he saw them now, he had seen Wolfe Ranke, turning over the refuse with a spade, as though in search, and half-bending over, digging.

"What war he lookin' for, does you reckon?" Nat Clark questioned eagerly.

"His bones, in co'se!" 'Bijah interrupted, vexed with the fatuity of the question.

Then somebody elaborated the theory that Ranke, being "onnatural" anyhow, and "tooken off suddint an' awful," might be bewildered and ill at ease in regard to his vanished mortality, and so have come back to look after it. Most people had friends and kindred who might be safely counted on to do a creditable part by the remains; but Ranke had no one.

"We-all buried them bones good, an' trompled down ther dirt an' mounded it up," Nat protested. "Look-like Ranke ought'r know that—bein' a speret an' gifted."

Then the blacksmith himself, who was present, suggested that Ranke might not like the place where his remains had been put, "seein' 'twa'n't no reg'lar graveyard whar t'other folks' boneses was a lyin' an' a-waitin' fur Jedgment Day. He mout think them bones o' his'n would be lonesome away on ther mountain by tharselves." Or his grave might cramp him. The hole they had dug would only have accommodated a two-year old child with comfort, and Ranke was a "full-grow'd" man.

There was something pathetic about this view of

the situation, which caused an uncomfortable and conscience-smitten silence. They felt somehow that they had not done a full neighborly part by Ranke, and that perhaps his spirit had just cause of complaint. The idea of being shunted off from even dead fellowship, and cramped into a place too small for them besides, was irksome.

Trotter introduced a different train of thought by declaring querulously that he did not believe that the "ha'rnt" was dissatisfied with either the place or manner of his interment—the hole had been big enough for what had to go into it. He had not been meddling with the bones at all, and he must know their whereabouts as well as any of them. He had been digging in the ruins—searching for something.

"You-all never found 'em all," Trotter affirmed acrimoniously. "Ther ashes war hot an' you-all never looked good. Thar war toe j'ints missed, or fingers. He war lookin' fur somethin', an' t'wa'n't nothin' else to look for. He never lost nothin' 'cept'n' his life an' his j'ints. You-all never looked good."

His tone and manner more than his words nettled them. Both were defiant, and, indirectly, accusative, as though some reprehensible negligence on their part was responsible for Trotter's scare. The mood of the listeners changed; they began to remember that the man who reflected upon them had not turned a hand in the matter himself. They turned upon Jim at once and mocked at and made game of him, accusing him of "skeerin'" at shad-

ows and glamours of twilight. And one bold spirit even intimated that men had been known to surround themselves with flimsy notoriety by limitless lying.

"Ther ha'rnt chased you tol'r'ble peart, didn't he, Jim?" one derided. "You air pow'ful harried to look at. Yer breeches air split up the laigs from hem to waistband an' flops about like clo'es on a line. It air redic'l'us."

"What sort o' time do a ghost make trackin', Jim?" hooted another. "Do he amble slow, or come a-jumpin'?"

"Ther ha'rnt know'd Jim never picked up nary bone, an' aimed to git even with him!"

"Lord-a-mussy! S'pose he had ketched up 'long o' Jim an' bit him!"

These suggestions evoked yells of laughter and more rough chaff. The idea of a man of Jim's size skipping down through the laurel brakes with an active ghost in hot pursuit touched their sense of humor. It might have been a still hunt, but it must have been an exciting one.

But despite their jeers the story stuck, and when it gradually came to be supplemented by other stories of the same trend, vouched for by other parties, the people quit smiling and began to frown down jokes. And when, after the third anniversary of Ranke's death, the two hunters moved out and abandoned their cabin, giving as a reason that when the night came round, wet or dry, they could see the same red flare against the sky that they had seen at the time of the burning, the uncanny im-

pression solidified into fixed belief and the clearing was shunned even in broad daylight and by boys with rabbit-traps to set.

The supernatural interest fluctuated, now sweeping in at full tide, and again ebbing almost away, but never ceasing altogether. It never amounted to anything tangible, at least not for years, but Ranke's "ha'rnt" served to keep his memory alive in the minds of the people and his place open in the country-side. Being dead, he yet seemed most unpleasantly alive.

Events, like powder, may quietly lay in train for years, awaiting the spark which is to set all alight, up-tear the earth, and flash the atmosphere a-quiver, and when the explosion comes at last, more often than not, the spark of ignition will be the word of a woman's mouth, spoken apropos of something utterly alien.

About a mile from Jim Trotter's house, in a little skirt of country known as the "burnt woods," there lived a poor widow, with a great many children, named Watts. The family was notoriously thriftless, and the woman herself—Miriam Watts—was the most shameless and persistent borrower under the canopy of heaven. From a making of coffee, or a needleful of thread, to the garments upon her neighbors' backs and the beds which they lay upon, Miriam borrowed straight through, by and large. The people put up with it, albeit they grew restive at times, because she was a woman with "no man to do for her," was poor, and had a house full of children. But being put up with, she encroached,

as people of her kidney usually do, until at length she came to regard all help as her vested right, and to meet the smallest refusal with bitter and passionate resentment. Besides being a malignant borrower Miriam Watts was a gossip and termagant, and could do more mischief, with tongue and temper, in a week than other people could undo in a lifetime.

The Trotters, living nearest at hand, were most frequently depredated upon, for it really amounted to that, and Lelia Trotter, albeit a patient woman and kindly with-all, was frequently moved to the declaration that it took "a sight o' religion" to sustain in grace such as lived in the burnt woods vicinity. Sometimes, when the requests would be particularly unwelcome and importunate, she would evade them by polite subterfuges, but she never plucked up spirit to kick resolutely against the pricks until one luckless Monday early in December.

She had just gotten her week's wash in the tubs, and the ingredients for a big making of soap to boiling merrily in a monstrous three-legged pot uplifted on rocks in the back yard, and was feeling fore-handed and comfortable when two of the Watts boys appeared, bearing a pole between them, and also a message from their mother, to wit, that she had "dripped a nice passel o' lye, an' got her truck all ready fur soap-b'ilin', an' would be obleeged to Miss Trotter fur the loan o' her big soap kittle fur a week."

Mrs. Trotter was stirring her own soap in the identical kettle at the time, and remembered more-

over that her neighbor had borrowed her property six months before to boil dye for carpet rags, and had only restored it, under protest, a short fortnight previously. It really seemed that there should be a limit. Under exasperation at the impudence of the thing she stirred so vigorously that the hot stuff in the kettle splashed up on her hand, eliciting an exclamation of pain which moved the young Watts mightily to laughter.

Then religion proved but a vain pretense, and for a moment Lelia Trotter was given over utterly to nature. She openly denounced Mrs. Watts as the "meanes' white 'ooman whar draw'd ther breath o' life," and opined that she would "plumb down to borry a settin' hen off'n pipped aiges, or a corpse's petticoat whenst a fune'al war in session." This statement she supplemented by a stinging message that she—Lelia—was "done tuckered out, pourin' water in a leaky bar'l, an' aimed to quit." If Mrs. Watts felt herself "obligated to have a big kittle *all* ther time she'd better buy one an' own it."

As soon as the words were well out of her mouth Mrs. Trotter regretted them, for the woman was miserably poor, and she knew it. But the mischief was done then.

When Miriam heard the words as reported by her offspring she fell into an exceeding great rage, and straightway proclaimed far and near that "Lelia Trotter needn't set herse'f up so highty-tighty 'bove'n other people an' be so onnayborly with her p'isen ole truck, bekase if truth war known an' justice done to daid *an'* livin', thet truck wouldn't be no

mo' *her'n* 'en nothin'. Bein' bought outright with money Jim Trotter didn't have no right to, come by it how he might." What did she mean? Why she meant that it "war Jim Trotter an' no yuther whar obligated Wolfe Ranke's ha'rnt to walk. An' walk he would, plumb 'twell Trotter war jailed an' convicted *an'* sentenced fur a-slaughterin' of him." She would like to know how Lelia Trotter would feel then, after "mistreatin' a lone widder-'ooman, whar didn't have nobody, 'scusin' chil'en, to take up fur her."

Miriam took up for herself so furiously that it really left nothing in that line to be desired. The neighbors pooh-poohed her accusation at first, but she persisted in it, being the malevolent sort of woman who will wreak vengeance for even supposed injury at all hazards. Her knowledge of past happenings was principally conjecture built up around one lonely fact, but she helped it out with hint and innuendo, concealing her paucity of information under a wealth of assertion, and bourgeoning with importance, as one who unlooses the seals of judgment. Having started the scandal through temper she stuck to it through obstinancy.

The story flew from mouth to mouth, generating suspicion and hard judgment in its transit. A reputation assailed is a reputation maimed, if not totally destroyed, and the neighborhood began to look askance at Jim and to edge away from him. The bucolic memory is tenacious of trifles, and people began to remember and put together as significant infinitesimal things which at the time of happening

seemed to make no impression. This new and sensational theory of Ranke's death became popular and little else was talked of. Even the clearing was revisited, and the small grave which held the bones of the dead man, by squads of men and women who gossiped and wondered, and then got them home again before sunset for fear of the "ha'rnt."

The scandal circled and dipped, like a leather-winged bat, until it finally alighted in the mind of Munroe Giles, the sheriff of the county, where it clung with beak and claws. This Giles was a self-sufficient, conceited sort of fellow, new to office, and mightily puffed up with the pride thereof. To himself he seemed the very break-water of the Commonwealth, her sole defense against the incoming of tides of calamity. Official duty was his watchword. And when official duty and personal inclination agreed to pull in double harness he shook the lines and chirruped to the team with energy. Trotter's politics were different, and in the late election—a tight one—Jim had lumped his influence into the scale of the sheriff's opponent, which naturally gave Giles a poor opinion of his qualities of head and heart. Anxiety for the public weal, interplaying with the private grudge, produced in the sheriff such a frenzy of official zeal that he constituted himself the avenger of blood, *con amore*, and in this capacity journeyed up to the burnt woods to interview Miriam Watts.

By this time the woman was nervous and frightened at the serious turn affairs had taken, and so, to

reinforce herself, grew more blatant and assertive. And the upshot of the business was that Sheriff Giles betook himself to the proper authorities and lodged information on which a warrant was issued against James Trotter for murder and arson.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UGLINESS OF SILENCE.

This in brief was the history of Wolfe Ranke's posthumous part in the happenings of the past ten years, and the substance of it was delivered by Blake in the pithy vernacular, with frequent harking-back and breaks for question and reply. When the narrative came finally to a close Rutherford made little or no comment. He briefly remarked that things looked mighty squally for Jim and that he was sorry for it. Then he locked up his office and conducted the blacksmith back to the tavern, where he renewed acquaintance with the other men and insisted that all three should consider themselves as his guests, for the old time's sake. He gave them a good supper with things to eat and drink which they understood and liked, and afterward talked to them genially, exploiting old stories of boyish escapades, and reminding them of happenings which had grown misty even in their less cumbered memories. He discoursed of hunting and fishing, of crops, cattle and the revenue with an accuracy of detail which won mightily on his hearers. Insensibly they felt flattered and exalted in their own estimation, because this old play-fellow who had educated and done well for himself, still took active, intelligent interest in the homely life he had shared with them,

and was in no wise ashamed of it. They felt at one with themselves and with him, and inwardly convinced that they also could have made as fine a record had they been so minded. They voted him "a prime runnin' o' juice, cle'r an' sound frum ther still, an' mellowed conformable."

Had Rutherford set himself, with an ulterior motive, to make a good impression on these men of the soil, he would doubtless have failed, for your true rustic is at once astute and suspicious. But he did not. The part of his old life with which they had to do was pleasant to him, and always had been. The things he talked to them about were things that he loved—the clean, vigorous life of the hills. He had no need to dissemble, or to simulate interest.

Reminiscences of field and forest kept that other subject at bay, moreover, and was a refuge from thought. Deane was intensely conscious through it all that at his elbow stood an emergency of the grimiest, awaiting recognition, and to be faced and grappled with. He was conscious of its presence in every fibre of his flesh, every drop of his blood; but, for the nonce, he turned from it doggedly. Time enough to think later, he told himself, time enough to struggle for life or death with this hideous necessity when he should have braced himself a little by ignoring it. He would have to meet it, and he would meet it; but not yet.

Even after the mountaineers had sought their beds and he was alone in his own room, he dallied and delayed. He got out his model and set it in

motion, trying to fix his mind on force and cohesion, and to make calculations the most abstruse. He wrote a business note which he had neglected at the office, and then picked up a book and essayed to nail his attention to printed lines and characters.

It was no use, however; the hideous thing had been warded off to its limit. Now it thrust itself forward with determination and locked with him for the death-struggle.

With merciless distinctness memory showed him that which had been. Again he was a young stripling paying farewell visits of friendliness to all his old associates. Again he entered Ranke's clearing and was met tumultuously by the deer-hounds. Ranke came forward, a smile of welcome on his swarthy face, a light of hospitality in his pale, sinister eyes. They entered the cabin in friendliest converse, and he exulted in his plans and prospects while the "blue-gum" listened. They had dinner together, eating from the same dish, and drinking from the same cup, so to speak. After that the storm had come on again. He and Ranke had chatted and he had twitted his host with the meanness and inefficiency of his tongs. Then they had played cards—Old Sledge—for money, and he had won. He had drank whiskey, too—a great deal of whiskey, and he was not used to it. He had won and won, the cards seeming bewitched for his benefit. Finally he had been seduced into making a mad bet—into staking that which he loved best on the run of those miserable bits of pasteboard, and he had lost.

Once more he felt the stunned misery of those first moments of unlooked for defeat. Once more he pleaded with the victor, and offered double and quadruple the value of the red mare as her ransom. Once more he was scoffed at and derided until his temper rose and blinded him. The fierce fury of the fight returned, followed by the wild unreasoning terror and dread which the foaming mouth and canine demonstrations of his foe had inspired.

From the rest his mind shied away. Not from remorse, not in repentance, but in sheer human shrinking from horror—it had been so awful! He no more regretted killing his foe than he would have regretted killing a rattle-snake coiled to strike, or a rabid animal seeking to bury its fangs in his flesh. That had been what Ranke had seemed to him at the last—a rabid, dangerous brute. He had always held himself justified for the deed which he had done.

In the light of its consequences, there was one point on which he could not hold himself justified, and that was his own silence at the time. Evil had come of it, as evil has a fashion of coming of things hidden which should be revealed. But he had been young—a boy, and unstrung and bewildered by that awful catastrophe. He had needed to hold still and nerve himself. Then had come news of the burning of the cabin, and that had seemed to wipe out all evidence, to obviate all necessity for speech. Ranke had been alone in the world and unpopular. Who would inquire avidly into the arcana of his

taking off? Who cared specially whether he were alive or dead? Nobody—or it had seemed so.

Deane had always had his own theory to account for that fire, which had come so opportunely as to simulate a god-send. He remembered well the stack of fat lightwood Ranke had always kept beside the hearth, piled up against the log wall, handy for kindling. As they fought, much of it had been scattered about, on the floor among the cards and money, and on the rocks of the hearth. There had been a great fire burning, and he had left it so, without a thought. As the logs burned through and settled, what more probable than that a blazing chunk had rolled out, ignited some of the resinous stuff and so fired the cabin? This seemed the natural, rational explanation, and he had always held to it. He held to it still.

Neither the killing nor the fire troubled him then. What did was his own silence, which, since evil had come of it, he denounced as stupidity and cowardice. If, ten years ago, he had owned to his deed and stood by to take the consequences like a man, instead of coming off like a dumb fool sheep, he told himself, furiously, another man would not now be imperiled by it. Another man, innocent in intention and deed, would not have been robbed of character, scorned, pointed at, plucked from his family and cast into prison to answer for the work of his—Deane's—hands. It was maddening to think of, and Deane stamped about his room, clenched his fist, and longed savagely to kick himself for that past silence, which had seemed at the time so easy.

Do deeds never die? Must a man's actions, even a man's words, stand forever in evidence? Yea, verily!—for life moves in sequence, and the chain must pass link by link, without a break, or so much as a missing rivet, until the remotest limit of time shall be connected with the uttermost possibility of eternity.

If he had told then, Deane knew enough of his kind to be reasonably confident that he would have gotten off easily. Ranke had been disliked, had been feared, and he himself had been popular. But now? He had not trusted his old *confreres* in the first instance, and since then had removed himself from their sphere, had elevated himself to a higher level. He was no longer in touch with them—no longer one of them. He could not count on their support as he once might have done. All this was against him.

Since then also, unconsciously and ignorantly, but none the less certainly, he had let another man suffer in his stead. And this other, a mountaineer who was still of his own guild. Jim Trotter was not likely to treat leniently that which had cost *him* dear, nor were Jim's friends. That which pinches a man's own fingers awakens his resentment, and doubly so when the pinching is an injustice, and should be legally administered to quite other digits. Deane remembered his involuntary substitute well. It had been at Jim's house that he had staid the night before his ill-omened visit to the "blue-gum." He remembered Jim's wife also, even down to the sprigged calico gown she had worn, and Jim's chil-

dren. There had been a blue-eyed damsel among them whom he had esteemed pretty, and an inconsequent bullet-headed baby that had the colic and howled lustily between goes of catnip tea. He recalled even the look of the guns in the hooks over the door, and the banjo with which they had made merry after the homely supper and clearing up. From Trotter's hospitality he had gone straight to the doing of a deed which was to bring disgrace and misfortune on his host and all his belongings. The man was close-fisted, narrow, and illiterate; he was held to love money unduly and to hanker after its possession; but he was good to his own, lazily loyal to those whom he liked and, in a way, neighborly to poorer people. He was, moreover, innocent of the deed of which he was accused. All this too was against Deane. He felt it so.

He paced the room restlessly, pondering the situation. A badgered feeling came over him, as though for a small offense he were threatened with large chastisement. From his unsatisfactory grave, the "blue-gum" appeared to mock at him, mouthing derisively and laying his fingers to his nose as he had done once before. The luck of the game seemed to have turned to Ranke again, while he held only losing cards. What business had Ranke's ghost to walk?—scaring the inoffensive mountaineers and galvanizing them into preternatural alertness of suspicion and action. Underneath the culture of Deane's nature lay the old strata of superstition, inherited and ineradicable. The beliefs in which he had been reared were the beliefs which

stuck by him in emergency. Instead of explaining away phenomena with later-day reason, he resented it with pristine passion. This posthumous intermeddling in human affairs seemed to him an unwarrantable exhibition of spiritual officiousness. After all, what harm had he done Ranke more than Ranke had shown himself ready and anxious to do him?

And his life since! Had it not been upward every step of the way? His thought glanced over the record of the past ten years and showed that it was good. Much had been achieved, and more was in process of achievement. He was but thirty years old, and his best working days were before him; the days in which brain and hand would grow into their fullest power, their finest development. His future appeared to stretch away full of promise of usefulness, of honor and of happiness.

His eyes rested on his model, and he drew nearer the table, bending over it and moving the light so that it might reveal the delicate simplicity of the mechanism, the wonderful orderliness of the movement. When it should be perfected, as he only could perfect it, that tiny model, which he might have cabined in the crown of his hat, would mean much to him, and more to the race of men.

Then he thought of Joyce Ruthven. How fair she was!—how faithful and loving! He loved her, and he dared now to hope that he might win her love in return for his own. The look of her eyes when he had told them with his that day in the church came back to him, full of recognition, sug-

gesting promise. Joyce might love him in time. This too the future held.

But this other thing. What must he do about it? A thought came and he flinched and started as though hot iron were laid against his flesh. Then temptation arose and warred against the thought, even as Balak, son of Zippor, warred against Israel.

The man shook and trembled, swayed this way and that, and when he sought peace upon his bed it was not there.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEANE VERSUS THE DEVIL.

No rest had he that night, nor the next morning, for the devil abode with him and labored with diligence, making suggestions the most subtle, and arraying himself in the garments of an angel of light.

He went early to the stable, yearning for the touch and companionship of a loving, uncritical friend. The red mare whinnied as usual at his approach, and fondled him with her head, looking love into his eyes; but she brought him no comfort. He leaned against her shoulder, with his arm over her neck, and watched her stirring daintily, with sensitive lip, among the golden oats. He loved her, and she had cost him dear, but now in his extremity the old horse could not fill the measure of his needs. He did the things that were needful for her comfort, and then went away from her, closing the door.

After breakfast the three mountaineers departed, unwitting of the havoc they had wrought, and very much pleased with their visit, which they volunteered to repeat at some future day. They were profuse in their own proffers of hospitality likewise, in case he should "take er notion" to come back to

the hills for a fish or a hunt. Deer and trout still abounded in the old haunts, they told him, and his welcome stood waiting.

Rutherford saw them depart and then went down to his office, but peace was not there—nor decision. Nothing was there save the devil, who discoursed craftily and at length.

Why should he tell on himself after all these years? No one suspected him; there was no evidence of any sort to connect him with the deed. None would know. None would even imagine that his had been the hand which had opened the gates of eternity for the "blue-gum." He had only to continue the embargo of silence already laid on his lips and, for him, all would be well. He could go on with his life, growing in usefulness, in honor. What was Ranke's life worth to humanity, or Jim Trotter's either, in comparison with a life such as he could make his? Could Jim invent for the benefit of the race? Or Ranke construct? The "blue-gum" had been nothing to humanity save an incarnate menace. And how much more was this illiterate mountaineer?

Then he remembered that Jim's wife and family, even numerically, should be admitted to some share in human representation; and that to a dozen or more of the species Trotter stood for a good deal.

Well, was Trotter's life in any danger? Surely not. He was innocent of the crime and could doubtless set up an adequate defense. The whole suspicion, as far as he could gather, was grounded on the cantankerous accusations of a miserable

shrew who was not entitled to credence on oath, much less off it. There was the fact of money having fallen in to Trotter just about the time of Ranke's death; but that must be mere coincidence.

Trotter had only to show where the money came from in order to squelch any ugly significance which might be attached to it. For the disgrace?—what disgrace could come to a man from an unjust charge, after it had been disproven? And for the loss and annoyance accruing from the suspicion and arrest he would himself, in some indirect way, reimburse him. He would present that bit of land—his patrimonial estate, which he still owned among the hills—to some one or other of Trotter's progeny, and that would square matters. Trotter loved money above all things.

Having arranged this, it came over him that the local bar was accounted eminently shrewd, and that had the case been in truth so simple it would have been dismissed from the lower court. The men had told him that Jim Trotter had been regularly indicted, and was held for trial. By some ignorant misrepresentation, some chicanery of rustic prejudice, some misapprehension of facts, that which was not might be established. The Watts woman was malignant and obstinate. She had committed herself, and if she had lied out of whole cloth would probably stick to it. The jury would doubtless be impanelled of men of the district, ignorant fellows, intolerant and opinionated. He knew the sort well. Their sole idea of sustaining the personal import-

ance conferred upon them by transient authority was by the exercise of ruthless severity.

He—Rutherford—was ignorant of details. Suppose the case against Trotter should really appear strong. Suppose that money should in verity have been attained by unlawful means. Suppose Jim could not account for it satisfactorily, since coining and illicit distilling were neither unknown to the laurel-brakes. Suppose the North Carolina aunt had never existed, save by Jim's necessity, or, granting her existence, suppose she were not dead, or being dead had left nothing behind her. Would a rustic jury make nice distinctions? Not they. If lies and bad character could be established they would promptly punish for murder, and the more because it had been to Jim Trotter that the "blue-gum's" "ha'rnt" had first manifested itself. The accused might be a scamp, or he might not. That as far as Deane was concerned was aside from the case. But he knew that ill fame interplaying with besotted prejudice and circumstantial evidence had hanged men before now for crimes which they never committed.

The battle raged with varying fortunes. Deane tramped his office floor, in the pauses of business, as he had tramped that of his chamber the previous night. As he turned near one of the windows he caught a glimpse of Dr. Craige Hatton riding by. And over the top of a distant building he could see the spire of the village church. He swore aloud.

If he should give himself up—if he should ride forth to Tuckahoe Court House and surrender him-

self to be jailed in Jim Trotter's place, if, in fullness of time he should stand up in open court and be tried for his life on a sentence of murder—or, at lightest, of man-slaughter—what would happen? Why he would be a marked man for the balance of his days, and must give up all hope of Joyce Ruthven. He knew the pride of the family and he knew that, even at best, he would not be welcomed into it without, at least, covert, wry faces by many members of it. This other thing would bar him out as completely as though he belonged to a different species. Or so it seemed to him. Marry Joyce! Why he would not be permitted to touch so much as the hem of her garment unreproved. It would be between them as though a sirocco had passed, blasting every bud and leaflet even of friendship.

And she would forget him. After the first indignation, or the first pitifulness, as the case might be, had passed away, she would put him aside and marry that smug-faced, sanctified old priest, with his houseful of children and his maddening, unimpeachable respectability. Or worse still, she would give herself to that infernal young doctor, who even now might be cantering out to Manitoba to make himself efficient and useful to the child Joyce loved, and acceptable to her with purring professional confidence and abominably good-looking face.

And he—a better man than either, or so in his temper he assumed—had to stand aside and give up all, worldly honor, advancement, hope and love, because, forsooth, ten years ago he had resisted being bitten by a poisonous "blue-gum."

"It was hard," he told himself savagely; "it was damnably hard, and no question about it."

Then his conscience being a healthily active one, informed him that it was not because of Ranke's death, but of Jim Trotter's life that it behooved him to speak out and shoulder the responsibility of his own act.

He groaned aloud.

The whistle of a railway train came to him from a distance and touched his chaotic thought as with a hand of guidance. He looked at his watch hurriedly. There was time still to catch the up-train for Montaubon. He gave the necessary directions to his foreman and made his way over to the station, springing on the platform of the rear car as the train was moving out.

Arrived at the Iron-Works he went straight to Mr. Voss's office and was fortunate in finding that gentleman in and alone. Deane told his story without halt or circumlocution, setting forth the grim facts in their nakedness. From start to finish Mr. Voss hearkened carefully, only interrupting him from time to time with pertinent queries and deductions. When Deane made an end of speaking the older man remained silent for a space, going over it all in his own mind. It seemed to him a terrible waste somehow—a terrible pity.

Suddenly he leaned forward across the desk between them and looked into Deane's eyes, speechless still, but with his thought as plainly legible in his face as though it were matter printed on an open page.

Deane shrank away and threw out his hands. His own temptation reflected in another man's face showed itself to him in all its hideous nudity, in all its unclean, revolting meanness. He spoke through white lips, dropping unconsciously into the homely phraseology of the past.

"For risin' twenty-four hours," he said, "the devil hev been diggin' an' diggin' till he's scooped out a ditch in my road I can't hardly make aim to jump over. Don't help him. For ten years I've followed your word faithful, an' it has plumbed me a straight track, to move on man-fashion. Don't double back, sir! I couldn't stand it! Don't send me crooked after all these years!"

A swift flush mounted to the older man's forehead, and sudden moisture to his eyes. He laid his hand on Deane's and clasped it close.

"You're right, lad," he said huskily. "And I beg your pardon. There's a miry bit of road ahead, but drive straight, and I'll stand by you and see you through."

CHAPTER XIV.

THINGS LIKELY TO INFLUENCE A JURY.

THE country road system in the South, to the uninitiated, is as a thing inexplicable and utterly devoid of purpose. The county-roads, kept in at least passable condition by ceaseless official hounding, meander through the length and breadth of the land understandably enough. Their business is to link court-house to court-house, and they do it, holding them like fat beads set at intervals on a brown string. But apart from these there is an afflicting sub-system of mill-roads, ford-roads, wood-roads and plantation by-paths which have apparently no reason for being save that somebody, sometime, took a notion to ride or drive over a particular hill or through a special hollow, and that somebody else, attracted by the print of hoof or wheel, followed the track to see where the first fellow had come out, and so on *ad infinitum* until inalienable right of way was established.

But many of these pre-empted thoroughfares have really more method in their meandering than *prima facie* evidence would go to support. Instead of leading from nowhere to nothing, with a call around at everybody's house on the way, they have for genesis some lonely grist-mill set back in a hol-

low, and for exodus the village which holds the court-house.

Along one of the most serpentine and unsatisfactory of these roads Deane Rutherford made his way mounted on his red mare, who despite her years had no infirmities, and could get over ground in a style most praiseworthy. Beside him rode Mr. Voss, holding himself slack in the saddle, as though he were tired or unaccustomed to horseback exercise.

"Are you sure you've got the right road, Deane?" he queried, for the seventh time since their departure from the court-house village. "This way looks devilish lonesome and shut-in. I don't believe anybody lives here-away that can help themselves. We've come about ten miles already and haven't met a human creature except two nigger mill-boys, one with a head-turn and t'other on muleback. It's my belief you've branched out wrong somewhere."

Deane laughed.

"I haven't branched out anywhere," he declared. "I've come straight. And you're mistaken about the ten miles, Mr. Voss. It's only seven from the court-house to Lawyer Meredith's place, as the crow flies."

"It's seventeen as the road runs," grumbled Voss. "This infernal track doubles and twists like a pumpkin vine. Dark will overtake us before we get where we're going at this rate."

"Oh, no!" reassured Deane, cheerfully. "We'll be there shortly."

"How do you know? Ever been there before yourself?"

"Yes. But we didn't come this way. We cut into the road farther along from another direction."

"Your previous trips aren't likely to advantage us then," Mr. Voss remarked, dryly, then added for the sake of keeping up the conversation: "What did you come down to Meredith's for?"

Deane jumped the red mare over the trunk of a prostrate tree blown down across the road before he answered.

"My father had a oontract to furnish Meredith with a lot of shingles once," he explained. "And we agreed to deliver them on the place. He did most of the hauling himself and I staid in camp and helped to rive and draw, but sometimes he'd send me down with the team. I came alone the first time and nosed out the way well enough. It's hard to lose a woodsman in timber. We're going right now."

Having his doubts, Mr. Voss let that point pass and settled himself to take that which might come to him. The way led now through a burnt piney woods, inexpressibly mournful and desolate. The previous autumn a fire, set alight by a man twenty miles away who undertook to burn off new ground for a potato patch in a high wind, had swept through the region thereabouts, well-nigh destroying the forests. Even where the tall trees showed green crests, the bark of their trunks was seared and blackened, and the undergrowth was calcined and brittle, all vitality scorched out of it. The bare earth showed no brown covering of leaves, only sodden ashes and banks of dead coals where trees

and bushes had been charred through. Only the ground plants had escaped, and rats-bane, wood ferns and trailing arbutus strove to cover up some of the nakedness of the land with striped and glossy foliage, clusters of fragrant waxy blossoms and delicate feathery fronds. The hush after tumult appeared to hold the place, and the beat of the horses' tread pulsed the silence in rhythmic unison. Away in the distance the cry of a corn-crake rose into prominence, and from closer at hand the mournful note of a wood dove came like a reminder of pain. Other movement or sound there was none.

"What sort of man was your father, Deane?" Mr. Voss questioned suddenly. "Was he popular among the neighbors?"

Rutherford paused before replying, evidently trying to lay hold of the matter impartially. He knew well enough that Mr. Voss was arranging points in his mind for proper presentation to the lawyer, and that he considered the chance of hereditary popularity worth looking into. As a son Deane had been fond of his father; but he was trying now to regard him from the citizen stand-point.

"He was a Democrat—a Jackson Democrat, and always had been," he made answer. "And he fought well during the war. He was with Jeb Stuart up to Yellow Tavern, and afterward he guerrilled a bit under Mosby. He fought well, folks say, and was trusted by his officers. All that was before my time of course. It was before he married my mother. He was a high-tempered man, father was, as I remember him, quick with his tongue and quick with

his fists; but he wasn't malicious, like some, and he never took more advantage than was due him. I've seen him all but knock a man down for trying to cheat him in a trade, and then abate from the price of a steer out of his own head if the beast happened to be low in order. I reckon he was a good bit the sort of man I'd have been myself if I'd staid in the woods."

The listener thought that probable.

After a moment of silence Deane recommenced in a reminiscent tone.

"I'll tell you what *was* popular among the folk, and that was father's old fiddle. Father's reputation as a fiddler was enough wider spread than his reputation as a man or a soldier. There wasn't anybody could touch him at the bow anywhere around in this region. Folks sent for him from way over in North Carolina and Tennessee to play for 'em at merry-makings. There wasn't anything he couldn't do with that fiddle—it was a sort of gift of God with him, for he never had much teaching. At a shucking-match, or a junket when he'd take the 'old lady,' as he called her, out of the bag and lay her against his cheek and half-shut his eyes and bow the strings in a rollicking tune, the very hounds outside would look like they wanted to get on their hind legs and lead off up the middle and down again. And all the religion that ever was gotten couldn't keep the elders' feet from patting."

Deane stopped to look about him and turn into a side road.

"Yes, sir!" he pursued, in a moment. "Father

was a wonder with the fiddle. And the 'old lady' was a wonder herself. She could laugh and sing, trilling out chords as sweet as a mocking-bird's when he sits on the fence in the dawning, with the sun coming up red in the east, and the dew flashing and quivering on everything like rubies and diamonds; she could rollick like a school-boy out after chestnuts; she could chatter and scold like an angry parrot or a woman; she could whisper and sigh like the winds in the pines at midnight; she could leap and bubble and gurgle like water over rocks, and she could wail out with long, thin shivering notes like those you hear in the night sometimes in an old country house when there's a restless gale astir. I used to think that fiddle was bewitched when I was a kid."

Mr. Voss listened casually. None of this, to him, appeared likely to influence a jury.

As for Deane, he went on with his reminiscences at a canter.

"The neighbors used to tell a lot of tales on father about the old fiddle. They said that the reason why he always backed down at revivals and shunned getting religion was because Parson Spangler wouldn't let his fiddle come through along with him. Parson was a Hard-shell, of the hell-fire and brimstone believing sort, with no more appreciation of music, outside of a psalm tune, than a hog has of astronomy. He had never heard father play a note in his life, and he didn't want to either. Bowing and fingering and all the rest of it were as unintelligible as Choctaw to him. He knew about sack-

buts and psalterys and harps with solemn sound, because he had read about 'em in the Bible—that is, he knew how the words looked. He talked about 'em knowingly and promised father his choice of 'em to play on in the better world, if he'd only give up the fiddle in this, and let himself be saved. But father wouldn't. He allowed he might live to be ninety years old—men did sometimes among the mountains—and as he was only thirty-five then, it would give him upwards of fifty years of dumb lonesomeness to worry through before he could lay bow to string again. His hand would get out for want of practice, and when an unfamiliar instrument was handed him, he'd make no showing before the Throne worth noticing. The angels would laugh at him maybe and make him ashamed. Then too the more he compared the unknown heavenly instruments with his dear, old, familiar earthly fiddle the less he felt inclined to swop.

"Father had a healthy respect for the devil. He had been raised with it. And the thought of fire and brimstone, as elucidated by the preacher, was not agreeable. Mother wanted him to join the church too, and that influenced him. He hankered after salvation and he hankered after his fiddle. He offered Parson a compromise. If he'd agree to play psalm tunes, ride and tie, with worldly tunes, every time he sat down to his fiddle, would Parson let him get religion same as other folks? No, sirree! not much, Parson wouldn't. There wasn't to his knowledge a fiddle mentioned in the Good Book, from cover to cover, and he wasn't the man to inaugurate

innovations. A fiddle was the devil's delight, that's what it was, and holy tunes would be desecrated by being rendered upon it.

"That r'iled father, and he determined to get even with the preacher. As to there being no violins in heaven he didn't believe a word of it. He knew by himself how love of the instrument can curl in with a man's heart-strings, and it went against him to think that all the fellows who had made violins and played 'em were in hell. The readiest way would have been to show Parson how sweetly the 'old lady' could sing a psalm tune, but Parson wouldn't listen. When father proposed it, and even when mother backed him up, for she loved the violin and saw no harm in it in spite of being a church member, you'd have thought they'd invited him to hearken to the devil beating on a skull with cross-bones. Father wasn't to be outdone, though. He was bound to get justice for the 'old lady' somehow.

"He laid low, and kept dark until the next big revival time over at the log meeting house, and just before folks went into camp and the thing got swinging, took himself off, with his fiddle, down to Tuckahoe Court-House. The lawyers liked his music, and when he was in town during session of court, and known to have his fiddle along, they'd always have him up to play for them. I've seen a whole gang standing around him on the green, and Lawyer Meredith in the very forefront of 'em, knocking time with his walking-stick against the ground. This time my father sent word back home

that he'd got caught on a jury, and that the lawyers were going to have a dance at the tavern after court had adjourned and wanted him to play for them, so the Lord alone knew when he'd get home.

"The meeting went joyfully along without him, however. I was a right sharp chap at the time, and our house wasn't but a mile from the meeting-place, so that I put in pretty much all my leisure at the camp. Sinners were mighty rank among the hills that fall, and Parson Spangler got in another man to help him and fairly rolled up his sleeves and went for them. He preached so much about hell-fire that it was a wonder that he didn't burn his own tongue, and so much resin and brimstone flew about that an unconverted man was almost afraid to light his pipe lest he should occasion an accident. The sinners went down like cradled wheat and were gathered up in bundles and stacked on the mourners' bench.

"The afternoon of the third day is about the time when the wave of excitement crests generally; after that the congregation gets tired and flattens out. Four or five stout sinners had come through on a trot that afternoon and Parson was feeling proud of himself. While the elect were shaking hands with the newly-saved, he mopped the dews of eloquence from his brow, and after they got through he called out, 'Brethren, we will now praise the Lord by singing that beautiful hymn, "The Old Ship of Zion."'

"Somebody lifted the tune, and the balance, men and women, tumbled up to it the best way they

knew how. They made a swing and rush of sound that filled the place and broke out at the windows, so to speak, but, about the third line, it settled down and steadied. Then everybody noticed all at once that something had slipped into the music that belonged to it, and yet was lifted above it, as the soul is in and yet above the body. It seemed the voice of a woman, it seemed the voice of an angel, and it took the tune from the mouths of the people and carried it up and up in soft eddying flights, full and sweet as the song of the nightingale, thrilling and clear as the notes of our own forest minstrel. All the rough prayers, all the earnest, halting worship of the place appeared to have sublimated and embodied itself in sound and to be soaring away from our hearts straight into the infinite, carrying our messages to God.

"The people hushed gradually, one by one, and stared about 'em, a trifle awed at first and wondering. Where did the music come from? It was above them, hovering in the air as it were; its soft final diminuendo seemed to settle down upon them like a blessing. Parson just folded his hands together and lifted 'em, and said—sort of solemn: 'Brethren, this sacrifice is acceptable unto the Lord our God, and he has vouchsafed unto us a sign out of heaven. Yea, even a sound, as of angels harping upon harps before the throne of the Almighty.'

"The elders were mightily affected too, but some of 'em looked dubious and held back from seconding the motion for a special prayer of thanksgiving. They had better trained ears than the preacher and,

after the first surprise, it sort of came to 'em what might be the true inwardness of the heavenly voice."

"Did they find out?" questioned Mr. Voss, with a chuckle.

"They did that!" Deane admitted gleefully. "Down by the door there was a hole in the ceiling that led up into a loft. One of the fellows grabbed hold of little Nat Clarke, a shaver about my size, and hoisted him up there. Nat disappeared like a rat through a barn floor, but in a minute he popped his head back, grinning like a 'possum, and yelled out, 'Tell Pas'sen to hold up prayin', fellows. 'Tain't nary angel no more'n nothin'! It's jes' Sam Rutherford squattin' up here on a passel o' pine-tags foolin' we-all good with his blessed ole fiddle!'"

Deane laughed out with reminiscent relish as he brought the paternal escapade up to this climax. The scandalized countenance of the befooled preacher came back to him. Mr. Voss laughed also, as much at Deane's amusement as at the story. The fellow was so boyish still despite his years and his inches.

"Your father got some pretty heavy ecclesiastical scourging, I reckon," he commented. "He deserved it."

"No, he didn't!" chuckled Deane. "Parson looked so funny and snapped-off, standing there with his mouth gaping like a cat-fish, that some of the girls and boys got to giggling, and that touched off the balance. Some of the deacons laughed till they cried, and one of 'em swore that if hymning was

any sign, Rutherford's old fiddle was as good a Christian as any of 'em. The trick in-about broke up the meeting though. The converts couldn't half attend to gripping salvation for cocking their ears upward for a voice from heaven. Father made Parson the handsomest sort of apology, and explained that he was only after proving that his 'old lady' wasn't given over to the devil and his works, like Parson said. He wouldn't have done it in church anyhow if Parson would have listened outside."

After a final elbow the road left the woods to wind through a broomsedge field, galled and gullied in places, showing red cuts like gory lacerations, and studded about with scrub pine and sassafras. It was used as a sheep pasture, being fit for nothing else, and quite a flock of the pretty harmless creatures started from the roadside at the approach of the horsemen, and sheltered in the chaparral. A blowsy colt, evidently bored by seclusion amid uncongenial company, greeted them with whinnies of delight and joined the procession with sincere uplifting of his heels to heaven. He accompanied them to a gate on the farther side of the field with many cordial demonstrations, and could only be discouraged from further attendance by having the gate rudely slammed in his face.

A good meadow, wherein grazed horses and cattle, now bordered the road, which circled graciously to an eminence, where an old-fashioned two story frame house with a quaintly gabled roof adorned with flattish, slanting dormer-windows, was well set

amid a grove of forest trees. The building was painted a pretty dead-leaf color, all except the bit of wall framed by the front porch, which by some vagary of taste had been left a dingy white, and showed odd and incongruous, like a light patch on a dark garment. In front, a beautiful yard, softly verdant with the natural greensward of the region, sloped down to the level where the road was, and the big entrance gate. Beyond the dwelling, and somewhat removed from it, were the domestic offices, and beyond again a fine garden.

"The first time I ever saw that house," Deane observed as they rode up to the front gate, "it looked like a blaze-faced horse to me. The two gable peaks set up like ears, and there used to be a Virginia creeper that tumbled over between them from somewhere behind and made a first-rate forelock."

"It does look like it," assented Mr. Voss, dismounting.

"I haven't been here since the war. The place isn't changed much. I used to visit here-away a good deal in my buckish days."

"Folks say that Lawyer Meredith was engaged to be married once," hazarded Deane, "and that he was fixing up and getting ready—re-painting his house and all that—when word came that the young lady was ill unto death. They say he stopped everything, right there, when the painters had done all but that scrap of wall inside the porch, and that after her death he wouldn't have anything finished. I wonder if it's a true tale."

Mr. Voss nodded. He and Travers Meredith had

been classmates at the University of Virginia, and associates thereafter through many pleasant days and years. All of the other man's external history was known to him. He did not think it worth while to inform Deane that the dead girl, so nearly a bride, was none other than the "sweetheart" to whom he himself had alluded some months previously. It is touch and go with old stories, and this one seemed to move up nearer to him, out here in the woods, than it had done before in years. Perhaps because of the proximity of the man who had not forgotten.

CHAPTER XV.

LAWYER MEREDITH.

A GENTLEMAN, who had witnessed their approach from his library window, stepped out on the porch to give them greeting. He was accompanied by a miniature black and tan rat-terrier, who rose to the occasion by planting himself on the top step, denying them entrance and seeking to intimidate them by a succession of yapping barks which sounded as if they might have been squeezed out of him by pressure. This furious beast Deane Rutherford promptly caught up in his hand and set upon his coat sleeve with a cheery "halloo, dogalums," which the guardian of the place found disconcerting.

"Lawyer" Meredith, so called by the countryside, as though he singly represented the jurisprudence of the district, met his guests with hospitable welcome. He ushered them into his own legal sanctum, and made them comfortable in leather arm-chairs which had the ponderosity, the color and the odor of law-books. He was a tall man and spare, with a decided slouch in his shoulders, one of which he held stiffly, and frequently rubbed and manipulated with his hand. In his fighting days a fragment of one of the enemy's shells had torn it pretty well to pieces, and now that years were

doubling up on him it gave vantage ground for the deposit of rheumatic poison. His face was smooth shaven, save for small mutton-chop whiskers which joined his iron-gray hair at the temples. His features were harsh, the chin very square and uncompromising, and the mouth a trifle hard, but the eyes were fine, a clear, warm brown, that could lighten and flash with energy and excitement, or melt and glow with tenderness.

His voice was toned curiously and, at first hearing, was apt to jar on the ear, to seem somehow reedy and inadequate. But let the man fire to purpose, or warm to effort; put him on a speaker's stand with the populace in front eager for his words, or at the bar of a crowded court-house with a knotty and interesting case in hand, and a foeman worthy of his steel in the opposition, and it would be speedily discovered that nature makes no blunders. No other vocal organ could so aptly have served "the man behind the voice;" no other tones could have lent themselves so absolutely to the rendition of his subtleties of mood. In sarcasm or invective its caustic bitterness carried words to their point like a dash of vitriol; in argument or exhortation it winged them like darts, swift and straight to the target, and in appeal it could so intensify pathos, so play upon emotion that it was a common saying at the local bar that "Trave Meredith as good as carried his jury in his breeches pocket."

Had the times of Henry and Clay been his, Meredith might have achieved a reputation equal to theirs, having truly as they had the gift of mag-

netic oratory. But at the very outset of his forensic career, when his scarcely won spurs still glittered at his heels, there had come into his life a sorrow of the sort to which men of his emotional temperament oftentimes prove as blasting as siroccos. He had loved a woman, not only with his heart, but with every fiber of his being, mental and spiritual. With his love, Meredith had bound up his ambitions, his hopes for professional advancement, and his aspirations of every sort, and when death robbed him of love it seemed to pull the linchpin, so to speak, out of everything. The man went all to pieces for a time, and could only move as one disabled.

The Civil War, which broke out in his thirtieth year, helped him to brace up to manhood again, by dint of enforced exertion, and of the various strong emotions then called into play. He served well and honorably, but ended, like his betters, with a dislocated life, a depleted exchequer, a clear conscience and a skinful of aching bones. The struggle for existence filled the years of reconstruction so full that there was scant room for other ambitions than those involved in the meat, drink and clothing problems, and when, at length, Meredith got his head sufficiently above water again to look about upon the world and the wonders thereof he found that his day was past. In the great centers life had changed, in law-courts as elsewhere . Men had no longer time, or inclination, to listen to elaborate arguments and speeches, be they never so eloquent. Hurried sons stood in the place of leisurely fathers;

other methods prevailed, and conciseness and expedition were the watchwords. Even in Virginia the day of forensic law had waned, and the day of "office-law" was dawning.

Only in the rural districts, where life was still unfevered, something of the old appetite for talk lingered, and men could hearken to a speech with periods, and discuss it relishingly afterwards. So Meredith, knowing his own gifts, and clever enough to be cognizant likewise of his limitations, accepted himself as a survival, and settled down to a country practice which, apart from a comfortable maintenance, could give him nothing save local celebrity. This, however, he had in full measure, being a sort of special fetich in the courts where he practiced, a power before a circuit judge, and the dictator of a rustic jury.

With politics he had little to do, save when some State or county issue pressed, and when well-intentioned friends sought to inveigle him into larger political affairs he would turn them aside with a jest or an epigram. When hard pushed, however, he did not scruple to declare roundly that statescraft lay dead beside eloquence, and that for trader politics he had no aptitude and less inclination.

For a number of years Lawyer Meredith had eschewed the lower branch of the practice, confining himself almost exclusively to civil law, and only consenting to take a criminal case occasionally, when the facts interested him by seeming to develop points that were unusual. Jim Trotter's case, as presented by himself, did not stir the great

man's interest, so that he saw no reason to depart from his accustomed rule and passed Jim on to another man who was working up a reputation in the criminal courts. The commonality had almost a superstitious feeling in regard to Meredith when the law was in question, and the general feeling when Jim failed to secure his services was that the "tight place was liable to git a durned sight tighter afore it slacked" for the mountaineer.

This feeling Deane Rutherford shared to the uttermost. He had inquired of the blacksmith at once who was Trotter's counsel, feeling even at the outset that the matter might be one of vital moment to himself, and when a name was given him which conveyed no special significance to his mind he felt his spirits touch zero. He took it for granted that as the case was already docketed the counsel must stand the same whether the client shifted or not. Mr. Voss set aside this notion with vigor.

"You must have Meredith," he declared. "If any man in the State of Virginia can get the right sort of verdict for you, he can. Trave Meredith can not only see straight himself, but he can make a jury look through his eyes. There's no question about it, Deane. You must see him at once."

"But Meredith's given up criminal practice entirely," Rutherford demurred. "At least that's what Blake and the other fellows told me. This man Trotter has may be good for aught I know, only I never heard of him before. He's been working up the case. Meredith hasn't showed in a criminal trial for years."

"He'll show in this one," confidently asserted Mr. Voss. "This other fellow can be associated with him of course, but Meredith must be in the lead—that's settled. I'll send him a letter to-night, and as soon as the answer comes we'll ride over to his place together and talk about the case. Keep up a stout heart, lad. And have horses ready at Winock when I wire you. We'll pull you through this among us. Meredith will gladly do me a good turn for the sake of 'lang syne.' It will be all right."

The lawyer amply justified his old friend's confidence in him. He responded to Voss's letter cordially and at once, bidding him bring his protege over so that the case might be gone into. The spring session of court at Tuckahoe Court-House would open on the second Monday in April, and March was now well under way. It behooved them therefore to get things in training, or the case might have to lay over until the fall term. A consultation had better take place as speedily as possible. On this dictum Rutherford and his friends had acted.

When the usual social amenities had been attended to, the lawyer turned in his chair, settled himself and led up to business. His conversation at first had been almost exclusively confined to Mr. Voss. Now he turned to Rutherford.

"You belonged to this region formerly, I understand, Mr. Rutherford?"

Deane promptly admitted that such was the case and proceeded to define his social genesis with perspicuity. He had been born and raised on Tucka-

hoe Mountain, he affirmed, and added that Mr. Meredith had known his father well.

"Which Rutherford was he?" the lawyer queried. "There are a good many of the name about."

Deane mentioned the paternal patronymic with a feeling that it set him apart from the ordinary rank and file. Rutherfords there were by the bushel, but there was only one Sam Rutherford of musical celebrity hereaway.

A smile flashed at once into Meredith's eyes. The name had, evidently, pleasant associations for him.

"Sam Rutherford! The fellow who played the violin? Of course I knew him. Every man at the Bar knew Sam and his 'old lady.' Many's the time I've shaken a leg to his music. And so you're Sam's son, are you?"

Deane nodded his head, feeling a distinct thrill of pride in the paternal reputation.

"I'd a great respect for your father outside of his music," pursued the lawyer. "He was a square man and never scrimped in width, or thickness, on a contract. The shingles he got for me nearly twenty years ago are well-nigh as good as when he delivered 'em. There wasn't a worm-cut, or a rive-splintered one in the lot—all sound and up to regulation. That was Sam. He was an honest man, was your father."

This was the sort of commendation to appreciate at full value; the sort that wears well and does not fade with time. A flush of gratification mounted to Deane's brow and he made instant acknowledgment.

"Yes, indeed; he was a good lot all around," Meredith repeated. "And, Lord! what a wizard he was with a violin. It was marvelous! I've listened to scores of professionals that couldn't touch him anywhere. When Sam would lay that old fiddle of his against his cheek, and start his right foot to patting there wouldn't be a still boot on the court-house green; and the very oxen would seem to jog along the road in time to it. Heaven and earth appeared to move in harmonious progression when Sam drew horse-hair across cat-gut. He was mightily missed among us when he joined the majority. Some of the fellows declared we ought to put the court-house in mourning. Who's got the 'old lady' now?"

"I have," smiled Deane. "But I'm not the musician my father was, anything like. I play because he taught me, and he played because he couldn't help it. There's a big difference."

The lawyer nodded. There was the difference between ability and genius.

There were associations connected with that bygone music which touched him. He felt distinctly drawn toward this client of his because of it.

His professional, as well as his personal interest received a fillip when Deane laid his case before him. The young man gave the story, as he had already given it to Mr. Voss, with concise simplicity. Meredith hearkened with his stern face in absolute repose and his keen eyes fixed penetratingly, analytically upon the narrator. His questions, when he put any, were leading ones, and he followed each

phase of mood in his client with the skilled insight of a finely-trained intellect. He wanted information other than that contained in external facts, and, as far as Deane could furnish it, consciously, or unconsciously, it passed into his possession. His brain quickened and grew alert, his interest flamed like a brush-fire. This case was not as other cases. It had emotional possibilities of a high order—and it turned upon a superstition. *That*, to the lawyer, was the salient point, and he pressed it, committing himself in no way, but sounding Deane.

To his satisfaction, rather than surprise, he discovered that his client's belief in the poisonous quality of the bite of a "blue-gum" was as pronounced and unmistakable now as it had ever been. Intellectual advancement and culture had not touched it. With Deane this belief was not a superstition; it was a simple acceptance of a physical fact, to his mind, fully established out of the mouths of many witnesses. It was true that he himself had never witnessed the malign effects of a "blue-gum's" bite; but other people had and he did not count theirs for lying testimony. He—Deane—had never contemplated the firmament through the Lick telescope, had never, indeed, seen a telescope of size at all, but he did not therefore discredit the statements of astronomers. Besides the look on Ranke's face, when he had lunged upward and snapped at him, had been sufficient to convince Deane, beyond a peradventure, of the "blue-gum's" own confidence in his ability to inflict death by fleshing his teeth.

"I've heard some of this before," the lawyer observed thoughtfully, when his client had made an end of speaking. "I mean about the bite of a 'blue-gum' being considered venomous. Haven't you?" turning to Voss.

"All my life," that gentleman assented. "But it has been chiefly among the negroes. White people must have believed there was something in it though, before the War, because I remember, on two occasions, going with my father to court-house sales of negroes, and hearing him refuse to purchase particular ones because they had blue-gums. Once it was a man, and the second time a woman, and both negroes were as likely and strapping as possible. I questioned him about it afterward and he said he'd just as soon have a lot of gun-cotton loose about the plantation as a 'blue-gum.' That they were the very devil."

"It's held to be a sign of royal blood among them, isn't it?"

"I believe so. They play the dickens on a place and terrorize the balance of the negroes, I know—or used to formerly. Things may be different among them now."

Meredith seemed lost in thought.

"When I was a small boy we had one," he deliberated. "It is just coming back to me. He was a lanky, spindling fellow, built like a black-snake; and there was an impression of awe connected with him in my mind. His wool was cut close, all except what negroes call the 'palate lock,' on the top of his head. This was very curiously arranged. It

was pulled up, and wrapped tightly with string made of eel's skin, for about an inch and a half above the skull. Above that it bunched out, like the wick of a mean tallow candle, thick and fuzzy. The effect was that of a lonesome palm tree on a desert eminence. My father sold him; but I can't recall what for. I must think that fellow up."

He turned to Deane. "I don't seem to remember ever having heard of a *white* man with blue-gums before. Are you sure this Ranke hadn't a black drop in his veins? Mulattoes have blue-gums sometimes. What's your idea about Ranke?"

Deane ruminated. "I always set him down for white," he answered. "He claimed it—stop, though!—he simply assumed it, like anybody else, and never, to my knowledge, was contradicted. Certainly not to his face. He had light gray eyes and a high nose, and I've seen many a full-blooded white with curlier hair. His skin was dark, but that might have been partly due to outside causes. What with weather and smoky chimneys, hill folks don't keep fair much. Some people used to hold that Ranke must have black blood on account of his gums. They hadn't anything else to go on."

"He was a stranger?"

"Not in my time. He wasn't born and raised on Tuckahoe, like most of the balance. He bought in and settled himself. But he was there—a grown man, as far back as I can remember."

"Have any company? Kinsfolks, or acquaintances coming to see him sociably from other places?"

"Lord love you! I don't know," Deane made answer hearty. "He wasn't popular, and his cabin was in a mighty lonesome place. He went and came a good deal himself—flitting suddenly and then returning. That was what made him so dead-bent on getting hold of my mare. He liked to feel a good horse under him."

"You haven't any idea what he did for a living, then?"

"He cropped a little. He owned a right good piece of ground, but most of it was in pasture. He was a mighty slack farmer too, and never had produce to sell. I've known him have to buy feed for his stock often. He raised chickens too, for cock-fighting. But he never sold any."

"And yet he always had money?"

"Always," Deane assented. "Folks used to wonder where he got it from. It was plentiful with him too. As I told you, there was several hundred dollars of Ranke's money scattered about the cabin floor when I came away."

"What became of that money?"

The lawyer lowered his tone and fired the question like a shot. Mr. Voss, wearied by this repetition of things known, had risen and gone to the window.

Rutherford stared.

"It was burned, I suppose, along with the cabin. That's always been my theory. The gold is mixed up somewhere with the ashes and the notes vanished in smoke. What else could have become of it?"

"That 'ha'rnt' knows."

Meredith's tone was significant.

Rutherford bent suddenly forward and lowered his own tone.

"You don't mean—you don't suppose——" he hesitated.

"Yes, I do. And you'll see I'm right too. Now say no more and we'll go for a stroll around the place to stretch our legs before supper. You will stay with me to-night, Voss?" elevating his voice. "My mother will like to see you again and have a chat about old times. She lives with me, you know, and is a wonderful old lady for upwards of eighty. You'll see for yourself. Your horses have been put away. I haven't anything like done with Rutherford yet."

And so it was arranged. After which the three men strolled out and visited the meadows and the stables, where the lawyer made the personal acquaintance of Rutherford's famous red mare.

But he did not see fit to disclose to them then, nor in the talk which he had with Deane later, just how much he himself knew about Wolfe Ranke.

CHAPTER XVI.

MIDNIGHT MUSING.

THAT night when all were asleep Meredith sat in an arm-chair over his chamber fire and reviewed the situation. His brain worked like an orderly piece of mechanism, adjusting, comparing, making deductions and arriving at conclusions. Before midnight he had arranged his plan of defence, subject to modifications, of course, but, in the main, satisfactory.

That done he busied himself with side issues, notably with all the stories he had ever heard about "blue-gums." Whether or not human beings could be scientifically convicted of the possession of poison glands he cared not a baubee. In verity, there might be *no* organic difference between the secretions of a discolored mouth and the secretions of one of normal redness. That was for others to investigate and determine. That which he had to handle was this belief as he found it. Among a certain class faith in the difference existed, and was responsible for definite results. It was wide-spread, moreover, and shared by both races. With white and black alike, a "blue-gum" was a creature gifted with the same deadly powers which pertain to angry serpents and rabid canines. They were held to be

"damned dangerous," and secretly feared and detested. It was marvelous! The more he pondered over the matter the more it struck him in that light. Knowledge of this belief, or superstition, came to him now as no new thing; but he had never definitely thought of it before, never recognized that, given certain conditions, it might prove a factor.

He cast his thoughts backward and endeavored to recall why that "blue-gum" once owned by his father had been parted with. He could remember the man's appearance distinctly enough, and his sinister aspect when he smiled. He could remember also the deference with which the other servants treated the fellow, and how they would make "luck-signs" with their fingers when they thought he was not observing them. What *had* that man been sold for? It must have been under pressure of some sort, for he was a specially valuable negro—a skilled mechanic. He would question his mother about it.

There were still, settled about the plantation, two or three of his father's people, contemporaries of the "blue-gum." He would interview them all and endeavor to elicit information and illustration on this point of venom.

Then his thought passed from the case to the client. He liked the fellow's straightforward manner, and his face with its honest outlook. To Meredith it seemed a manly thing that Deane should have come forward at once and assumed the responsibility properly belonging to him instead of waiting until things should be found out and the deed fastened on him from the outside—or worse still,

hugging himself in unsuspected security while another man suffered vicariously. The lawyer was too deeply versed in the arcana of human nature and too familiar with the seamy side of life not to be fully aware of how great must have been the temptation to silence. For any man who, like Deane Rutherford, must be the architect of his own fortunes in their entirety, to deliberately give himself such a serious social set-back as this might prove for the sake of truth and honor proved that his calibre was of the straightest. Meredith felt inclined to take off his hat in recognition of the bigness of this thing. Continued silence would have been so easy. There was much, however, in heredity. Old Sam Rutherford had been a square man, and it seemed fitting that his son should be cut by the same pattern.

And this pestilential "blue-gum" whom all the coil was about? Years before Meredith had known Wolfe Ranke well enough, and in more than one county-town, and had known little good of him. Members of the legal profession have often a pretty fancy for cards, and even for a set-to with cocks in a tavern back-yard. Meredith had never been overtly addicted to sport himself, even in his buckish days; but he had been brought freely into contact with men of all grades who were, Wolfe Ranke among the number. Ranke had never, to his knowledge, been detected in any clearly recognizable blacklegism, but he remembered well enough that the "blue-gum" had been accredited with a marvelous gift of shuffling and dealing. He

remembered also to have noted rural tavern keepers on several occasions refuse to allow card-playing about when Ranke was of the party. Once he had questioned a man who kept a primitive house of call in an outlying district as to the reason of the embargo, and had received in reply a generalization on the theme of too much money being dropped over cards at a tavern injuring business.

The two professions of Meredith's life, law and arms, had knocked out of him all false sentimentality, leaving as residuum an individual code of ethics simple in its severity. He honestly believed that, after a certain limit, the quicker the world was rid of an obnoxious individual the better for the body politic. It was for this reason, more than any other, that he had quitted the criminal practice. He had "no stomach to defend a man whom he thought in his soul deserved hanging," he was wont to declare. And once he had been known to actually thank the opposing counsel (out of court) for securing a verdict against him.

"I did the best possible for a case to which I was held by my promise minus my belief," he averred upon that occasion. "And I'm heartily glad that you beat me. Had I secured a verdict it would have been iniquitous, and my conscience would have carried a weight. Hey! What's that about the fee? Damn the fee! I'm ashamed of myself for defending the fellow anyhow, and I'll have none of his money in my pocket. You may be very sure of that."

This story, freely circulated, served to fasten on

Trave Meredith the reputation of being a crank. And so he was. More, he was an intolerant crank, opinionated and a trifle domineering, but the people trusted him and, despite his crankiness, were prone to follow his leadership. About the case in hand he had already a fixed conviction. The "blue-gum" had been killed because he needed killing. As he gazed into the fire, thinking, the lawyer's brows were knit and his jaws squared as though the dead man had inflicted upon him some personal injury.

The fire had died down to the back-log, a glowing mass of burning that had once been a massive stick of black oak. Even as Meredith gazed it parted in the middle and collapsed between the andirons, sending up sparks and giving forth a soft sound as the coals settled; pale violet flames danced up and down uncertainly and a faint film of ashes began to spread itself. Meredith's legs were crossed and his left hand rested upon his knee. The reflection from the bed of coals touched to light a heavy gold band which he wore on his third finger. His eye caught it and his expression changed. He lifted his hand and turned the ring slowly until his thumb nail rested in an inequality in the chasing. This he pressed and a thin slither of gold slipped around and hid itself in the other half of the circle, leaving disclosed, between narrow rims of gold, a finely braided tress of chestnut hair. The man's face softened and a glow as of youth came to his eyes. Then he drew the protecting sheath of gold again to its place and leaned back in his chair thinking.

Nearly thirty years before that ring had been given him by the woman who was to have been his wife.

The magic slides of long ago slipped forward and fell into position, one by one, and the lens of fancy, lighted by memory, reflected scenes like pictures. Thirty years ago the old homestead had been full of exuberant young life, and effervescent with fun, noise and jollity. His two sisters, so long staid married women that they had grown children around them, had then been the gayest of light-hearted girls, and Parke Oswald, his bonnie sweetheart, had been intimate with them. Sometimes she would come and pay them visits in the old house which they all thought was to be her home, but not often, for she had been a sedate little maiden with a very proper notion of how to manage her affairs. During one of her visits, when they had been engaged three months, she had given him this ring, with its hidden tress of her chestnut hair. How that visit came back to him, seeming to start out into prominence beyond its fellows, perhaps because it was the last time she had ever stood beneath his roof. They had had other guests as well, a sort of house-party in the cordial old Virginia fashion. Circuit court had been holding at Tuckahoe Court-House for more than a week, and in the evenings the gay young limbs of the law would ride out to the Meredith homestead for supper and, perhaps, an impromptu dance.

One afternoon came specially before him. He had been in court all day, arguing a case, and later

would take a party of young men home with him. As he left the court-house his attention had been attracted by a larger crowd than usual collected on the tavern porch, and he had sauntered across the grassy lane which did duty for a street to ascertain the cause of it. He had found the people grouped about a roughly-clad mountaineer who sat in their midst with a violin in his hands. And even as he had joined the group the man had lifted his instrument and drawn the bow lovingly across the strings.

Meredith had listened with the rest, feeling that this was no ordinary fiddling, but unable to determine then wherein lay the difference. It was a strange, wild melody, the like of which he had never heard before, and being a man who could *see* as well as hear with his ears, it showed him a lonely place in a far forest, mightily uplifted, and a tiny stream just forcing its way upward and outward. The air seemed full of the pulsing of nature, the wooing of nesting birds, the hum and stir of insects, the noises of larger life, and the breathing of winds. Through all and above all was the music of a stream newborn, learning its pathway out into the world, learning its language, and gurgling and murmuring over the effort. After a little the strains quickened, there were merry leapings from rock to rock, sudden slips down steep places, short or high, and still pauses for rest in pools. Then came mad, headlong rushes into whirlpools, passionate uprisings, with deep churning up of mud and foulness; swift falls, with the grim unsightliness of sodden banks, long stretches of peaceful flowing, and through all a

steady growth in power and volume. The music broadened and deepened and swung forward with a steady current. The plain was reached and there was a glad union of waters, and a grand pulsing harmony as the life of two rivers rolled forward in majesty to the far blue sea.

There had been talk afterward among the men and a change in the music, for Sam Rutherford had been a magician with the bow, but Meredith had not cared for any of it but this, which had fitted in with his mood and stirred him wonderfully. He had made occasion to question Rutherford as to where he had learned the thing, and had been quietly informed that "a cle'r spring up on Tuckahoe done it all comin' down the mounting, an' the 'old lady' she just followed natu'al."

He had been minded that Parke should hear it also, and so had arranged with Sam to come out to his place that very night and play. And before the rest of the guests assembled he had brought his sweetheart out to a quaint little side-porch almost like a balcony, and there Sam had played for them this music of the clear spring on Tuckahoe.

Parke, in her full-skirted robe of white, looking fair and sweet as an almond blossom, had been moved by the music as he had known she would be, and had leaned against him, in the semi-darkness, listening with lips apart and eyes filled with a tender dream-light; and as she listened her little fingers had twisted and turned slowly about his this ring which she had given him. And Sam, seated on the steps with his back discreetly toward them, had

seemed to know nothing, and yet to know all, and to subtly weave it into his music until the theme became instinct with the very pulse of life.

Thirty years ago that was—and there was nothing left of it but memories that would come, dream-like, to a lonely man over a dying fire in the night silence.

Meredith stirred in his chair, stiff from long sitting, and mechanically took out his watch to wind it. Through the still house broke the echoing sounds of a clock giving the hour, and from the poultry yard came the strident noise of the roosters crowing for day.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MANITOBA FAMILY HEAR THE NEWS.

MEREDITH threw himself into the case with energy and it was arranged that he should communicate with the prosecuting attorney at once, and attend to all necessary legal processes so that the trial for the killing of Wolfe Ranke might retain its place on the docket for the approaching term of court. There would be small difficulty about this, as the isolated courts of a country circuit are rarely conducted with full panoply of formal circumstance, save at discretion, and their dockets are seldom surcharged with business. Added to which the attorney for the commonwealth was a personal friend of Meredith's and not likely to prove himself a willful obstructionist.

Rutherford's instant surrender of himself when the facts became known to him would impress the Court in his favor, and Mr. Voss volunteered to go bail for him to any amount that might be required.

The man wrongfully held in durance must, of course, be liberated at once, with all necessary explanations. Rutherford mooted the question of reimbursing his involuntary substitute, at least for loss of time, and any damage which might have accrued to his business. The fellow had been in jail better than three months, he said, and had an inter-

est in a saw-mill back in the woods somewhere. His business must have suffered from neglect.

"No, it hasn't," the lawyer returned, comfortably. "I happen to know Trotter's partner, who is a middling sharp fellow and as lively as a grass-hopper. I'll guarantee any business he has a hand in will get looked after. Jim's got a couple of boys grown too, and his wife's a capable woman. As for the three months of jail, that ain't going to hurt him. I've got my own theory about Mr. Jim and we'll see what it's worth before he's invited to dip his hand in your pocket. Let the matter rest until we find out whether he hasn't had it there already."

"How are you going to find out?" queried Deane.

Meredith laughed.

"There are ways of squeezing out evidence," quoth he, sententiously. "And I'm familiar with some of 'em. For one thing I propose to see with my own eyes, hear with my own ears, and judge with my own understanding. In other words I propose to have an interview with that 'ha'rnt' before I'm done."

Deane laughed in his turn.

"'Ha'rnts' are pretty rank in the mountains," he affirmed. "Or they used to be in my day. They always are in neighborhoods where stills are run. You can jump 'em up in most any laurel-brake of a moonshine night if you're screwed up right. Jim Trotter had been tilting his elbow considerably, along with those hunters, I reckon. Lord bless you! I know 'em."

Meredith made no rejoinder and the subject, for the moment, lapsed.

As business, as well as legal, steps would be requisite to meet the situation on account of the complexity of interests involved, it was further decided that Rutherford should return immediately to Winock and consult with his employers. Arrangements necessary for the conduct of the factory must be made, to hold for the time during which Rutherford would be obliged to withdraw himself from management. Being reasonably sure of his verdict, there seemed no necessity that he should resign his situation, although that, of course, would be matter for the decision of the owners. That his employers should be admitted to confidence ahead of the general public, Deane felt to be their due, and he was resolute that everything should be open and above-board in regard to this affair in future. That one concealment of the past had been too prolific of unpleasant consequences to make him choose secrecy again for his friend.

For reasons which appeared to him cogent, he decided that the Ruthven family also should hear first of the affair from himself. He had no right to appeal directly to Joyce, or to assume that she had special interest in his life, and yet he most earnestly desired that she should get hold of the facts in their simplicity. Nobody better than Deane could realize how much his case might be prejudiced in the girl's eyes by exaggeration or misstatement. He canvassed the matter thoroughly, sitting alone in his office the evening of his return to Winock, and ulti-

mately decided that his best plan would be to communicate with Fred Ruthven. The dominant impulse common to humanity, irrespective of sex, to ventilate a sensational happening, and to assume superiority over being the first informed of it, might, he thought, be safely counted on to get the information conveyed to Fred's womenkind.

His first idea was to ride out to Manitoba and tell his story by word of mouth; but to this scheme, while, in some respects, it seemed most satisfactory, there were many objections. In the first place Joyce would get, instead of his—Deane's—version, a summary of the impressions made upon her brother subject to any lapse of memory or misapprehension that might chance. And in the second place it was by no means certain that should he go to Manitoba he would be able to see any member of the family. Scarlet fever still held the household in quarantine and anxiety. He had made inquiry immediately on his return, going purposely to Dr. Craige Hatton's office to do so.

Little Edmund was well past the crisis, the doctor said, this being the tenth day with him, but the whole flock had been infected and one of the girls was in bed and another drooping. Fortunately the disease had, so far, manifested itself in a mild form, but it was excessively treacherous in its nature, and prone to malevolent after-claps. In reply to Deane's question, Dr. Hatton further declared that on the principle of eruptive fevers, like lightning, never striking twice in the same place, the grown people should escape since they had all had it. It was an

anxious time, however, for all of them. The doctor unconsciously used the word "us," identifying himself with his patients as a good physician must, and speaking without overt personal intention.

Sitting in his office, Deane remembered the pronoun and was badgered by it. He felt miserably outside and set apart. None the less was he determined to do the best possible for himself. A man must be devoid of self-respect, or moved by some grand impulse of abnegation, who will quietly allow the woman he loves to think less well of him than the occasion warrants.

The letter he wrote Ruthven was a straightforward, manly piece of work, masterly in its directness, its terse simplicity and its positive assumption that the writer's point of view was the only one possible. There was not a rhetorical pose, an excuse, or an attempt at self-exculpation in the whole thing. It was a plain exposition of an awful necessity which in itself was justification of an equally awful result. Then followed the history of additional and subsequent results and that which must be their climax.

"Had I not heard from Dr. Hatton that your little son was out of danger," Deane wrote, "I should not have encroached upon time and forbearance by thrusting my affairs on your notice. As it is, my only excuse is that appreciation of the cordial hospitality extended me by yourself and family makes me unwilling to permit a, possibly, garbled public version of the affair to be the first intimation you have of it. I prefer to tell you the story myself. It is due you that I should do so. My one enduring

regret in the whole matter is that I did not speak out as I should have done ten years ago. There seemed no necessity for it then however, and my judgment was immature. That blunder must be rectified, and as speedily as possible."

When he reached this point Deane paused, pen in hand, longing to add some special message, some earnest word for Joyce. He felt it hard that he could not, that social restrictions held him aloof. He even felt it hard that he must take this matter to the head of her family instead of directly to her. But even while he chafed under them he felt that the restrictions were good—that women must be hedged in with seemliness of observance, lest men should lapse into primitive brutalities. Loving Joyce was not enough; he must induce her to accept the deposit before he would have any right to draft on her. He sighed impatiently; then closed his letter with simple expressions of good-will and sympathy, and proffers of such service as might be in his power.

When the letter reached him, Ruthven was smoking his pipe in the front yard, seated on a section of the vertebra of a whale, which had been presented to his grandfather as a curiosity by a sea-faring friend. It made a not uncomfortable seat, and the yard, feebly warmed by the March sunshine, seemed infinitely more attractive than the house, which had taken on the lonesome, preoccupied expression inside which comes with the presence of sickness. Ruthven was an anxious father, and when anything was the matter with his children would hang about the house a good deal, tormenting himself and

everybody else with endless questions and utterly impracticable suggestions. His eagerness to be of service was only matched by his incapacity, and the patience of the nurses was drafted upon heavily whenever they let him into the sick rooms. But they liked to have him about, even when he drove them well-nigh frantic, and to feel that every throb of suspense they endured found its reflex in him. They kept an eye on him too, and first one and then the other would come out and sit with him awhile, to cheer and comfort him.

Edmund was decidedly better and the little girls no worse, so Fred was feeling tolerably easy and disengaged, which was so much in Rutherford's favor. The boy whose business it was to handle the mail brought the bag out to Fred, who emptied its contents on to the grass beside him and picked out such as belonged to himself. The thickness of Rutherford's letter made him eschew it at first, but after a cursory examination of some bills and circulars, he broke the seal. The handwriting was unfamiliar and he turned to the signature, which caused him surprise. Deane Rutherford. Odd! What could a man just over in the village, hardly fifteen minutes' ride away, possibly have to say to him which would require such an amount of writing? His curiosity was aroused and he proceeded to inform himself. First he read rapidly, scanning the lines with only moderate interest, but about the middle of the second page he suddenly ejaculated "*The devil!*" like a man amazed, and clinched to his work with intensity.

He read the letter twice, from start to finish, and when he reached the signature a second time, pushed back his hat and whistled. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" was his thought. Then he bundled the rest of the mail into the bag again, restored his own letter to its envelope and pocketed it, and proceeded to the house in search of some one with whom to share this astonishing bit of intelligence.

As it happened, Joyce was the first person he came across. She was in the dining-room warming some beef-tea for Edmund over an oil-stove. Ruthven opened fire at once.

"Look here, Joyce, I thought you told me that Deane Rutherford was a gentleman."

Joyce stared at him in amazement, as well she might.

"So he is," she retorted, her eyes beginning to kindle.

"I don't mean in that sense," Fred amended. "Of course he's an honorable, straight-forward fellow, and all that. And he's just done as gentlemanly a thing as a man could do. I mean in the social sense purely. You gave me to understand that he came of good blood—of what negroes call the 'quality,' in short. How'd you get the impression? He's nothing of the sort."

"Who told you?"

"He did," producing Deane's letter, and intent on getting the matter straight in his mind all around. "He comes of a family of mountaineers living out here in the woods on Tuckahoe. Honest folks enough, I reckon, but poor, and utterly un-

educated. Where'd you meet Rutherford? Somebody gave me the impression that Uncle Charlie introduced him to you. Is that so?"

Marveling what all this preamble would presently lead up to, Joyce recounted her visit to the Iron-Works, her meeting with Deane, his courtesy to her and the favorable impression made, both on her uncle and herself, by his own personality and the encomiums passed upon him by Mr. Voss. She stated also that since the renewal of the acquaintance Deane had often talked to her of his old home, and his early life of primitive simplicity among the hills. He was by no means ashamed of his beginnings, she said, nor had he any cause to be. His father had been a freeholder, in a small way, it was true, but still living on his own land and paying his own way. That Deane was the architect of his own advancement redounded greatly to his credit. Joyce spoke nervously, almost aggressively, as though she were preparing already to do battle against prejudices. She held her voice steady and strove not to betray overt interest; but she was all the while quivering with excitement and suspense. Why should Deane be explaining his social status to her brother? Why should he interview Fred at all before he had spoken to her? Her hand trembled so that when she tried to lower the flame of the lamp she nearly put it out.

Meanwhile Fred, who had no glimmering of a notion that his sister's concern in the matter would be other than his own, mere outside interest and sympathy, leavened with pleasurable excitement over a

sensational story connected with a personal acquaintance, seated himself on the edge of the dining-room table, prepared not only to read the letter aloud, but to discuss it in all its ramifications. Never having entertained the idea that his sister might contemplate marrying Deane Rutherford, he had no sort of objection to him in the character of a self-made man, and indeed, rather admired the prowess which had resulted in so successful a making. He had simply made his initial inquiries to prepare Joyce's mind, as it were, for a proper grasp on the sequence of things. How could she understand about Rutherford's being so intimately mixed up with these mountain roughs unless she realized first the fact that he also had come of the people? Finding her better informed than he had supposed, he wasted no more time in preliminaries, but dashed at the main item, delightfully conscious that he was about to make a sensation.

"Rutherford's in no end of a pickle, Joyce. He's regularly up a tree—and a mighty tall tree, at that. He'll be lucky if he gets down on his feet, I can tell you. He's written me all about it, which was an uncommon handsome thing to do considering how short a time we've known him. He says our kindness, hospitality and all that gives us the right to hear this story at first hand. Not one man in a hundred would look at the matter in that light, which makes me say that it is handsome of Rutherford. It seems that ten years ago—stop! I'll read it to you. Here's what he says himself."

Fred flirted over a page, and then turned it back

again, searching. His sister had drawn nearer—her occupation for the moment forgotten. Her heart beat thick and her face was blanching; in her dominating eagerness to know instantly what it all might mean, she had much ado to keep from snatching the letter from his hand. This could be no love story which had been told her brother. What was it?

In the next few moments she knew.

And Ruthven got all the sensation he had counted on, with a margin, for without a word, but with a face as pallid as a dark-bleached plant, Joyce caught the letter from his hand and went away with it straight to her own room.

Left thus unceremoniously alone, the young man stared after his sister with amazement mingled with dawning comprehension. His under-jaw dropped, and his attitude of mind developed into one of unqualified consternation. Here *was* a pretty kettle of fish with a vengeance!

When his wife came out of the sick room three minutes later in pursuit of Joyce and the beef-tea, he poured the whole story into her ear, following her back to little Edmund's bedside and continuing to talk while she gave the child nourishment.

Louise listened with interest and consternation equal to his own. Her mind grasped the practical side of the situation at once.

"This is awful, Fred!" she exclaimed, "perfectly awful! Can they do anything to him? As I understand the story, it was simply man-slaughter. The men fought in anger and one killed the other. It might just as easily have been Mr. Rutherford him-

self who was killed. It was an even fight, you say. Can they do anything dreadful to him?"

Fred pondered. "We haven't got all the bearings of the case yet," he answered. "We've only heard Rutherford's side of it. If he can substantiate his story, I don't see how the verdict can be other than justifiable homicide. But that's the point, you see. He may not be able to prove his position, or the other fellow may have friends who will push the matter to its limit. Such a thing as an unbiased jury isn't possible. It's tom-foolery to claim that there can be, and Rutherford may have to run the gauntlet of all sorts of ignorance and prejudice. The best sort of men dodge jury-service like small-pox, and the rank and file who usually serve can't be counted on. It's my opinion that they'll bring it in manslaughter."

"And that will be——?" Mrs. Ruthven looked at her husband questioningly.

"Imprisonment in jail, or penitentiary, for a long or short term as the jury may determine. It's a pretty serious business you see, my dear."

"And if he gets the other verdict—what then?" she inquired.

"He'll be acquitted of course. Justifiable homicide *is* acquittal—it's proving that a fellow couldn't have acted other than he did. If Rutherford gets that he'll be all right with the world, because everybody knows killing is imperative sometimes. But he mayn't get it. Good Lord! it makes me hot all over to think about it, because of——" He paused and stared interrogatively at his wife.

She returned his look with one of vivid intelligence, but said never a word.

"How long have you known about this, Louise?"

"About what?"

"Don't pretend! It's exasperating! You know well enough what I mean."

His tone was impatient.

"How long have you?"

"I give you my word such an idea never crossed my mind until fifteen minutes ago. It was Joyce's own face that gave her away. Rutherford's an agreeable, talented fellow, and we all liked him. I knew all that well enough. But I never suspected anything special in his coming, more than that he found the place pleasant."

"And you and me also, and the children," derided his wife. "*We* doubtless constituted the supreme attraction. I wonder when men will cease being moles and bats about their own sisters? Mr. Rutherford's state of mind has been manifest for weeks. *Anybody* but an idiot—or a brother—could have seen what he was after. It was fairly signboarded."

Ruthven thrust aside the imputation of obtusity with acrimony.

"A man's head wasn't always running on sentiment," he declared. "And he hasn't got his eye cocked for a love affair every time one of his own sex comes near a pretty woman. He's got other things to think about; things of vastly more importance."

"Could *anything* be of more importance than this?"

Louise demanded, pertinently. "If so, I'd like you to show it to me."

Floored for the nonce, Ruthven dropped into a chair and proceeded to work himself into a fume of indignation all around. It was monstrous and abominable! What right had a fellow like Rutherford, with a criminal trial liable to bounce out on him at any moment, to come philandering after any respectable young woman? And what business had Joyce to be encouraging a man of whose antecedence she knew, one might say, next to nothing? Above all, what the dickens was to be done about it? He —Fred—felt like a man standing in semi-obscurity surrounded by wires and pulleys and afraid for his life to lay finger to any one of them lest he should precipitate some horrid catastrophe. His wife counseled a masterly inaction.

"Wait," she said, astutely, "and don't move an eyelash or stir a finger. Time enough to meddle when you find out what the verdict will be. The trial itself may settle the matter with Joyce, and it's no use in getting into hot water beforehand. Mr. Rutherford, as far as I can judge on your report, has behaved well, and his giving himself up was a grand thing. I must see his letter myself. Where is it? Oh, Joyce has it. Well, I'll get it from her after awhile. And, Fred, don't you go crusading about Deane Rutherford. I'm a woman myself and I know that just as sure as you do Joyce will exalt him into a hero and martyr at once. When a woman begins to champion a man the only thing that ever will save her from him is for the man *himself*

to fail her someway. Outside pressure will never do it."

Which observation went to prove Mrs. Ruthven not only a clever, but a womanly woman. Her husband acquiesced in her dictum, partly because his own sense showed him that the time for intermeddling in his sister's affairs was not yet; and partly also from an inner conviction that if there should ever come a clash of wills between Joyce and himself it would be Greek meet Greek.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW JOYCE TAKES IT.

In her own room Joyce read and re-read Rutherford's letter, trying to grapple with its very arcana, to look beyond the characters and signs upon the page into what must have been the writer's thought as he penned them. That past event of his life was horrible to her, not as a thing over which he had had control, but rather as an outside and hideous misfortune. The idea of attaching blame to him for killing the "blue-gum" never entered her mind; she only felt commiseration and sympathy that such a cruel necessity should have arisen. In truth she thought precious little about the dead man at all. He was, to her, a miserable creature who had sought to destroy her lover, and if he had perished in the attempt, why, he had gotten no more than he deserved.

Women are cruel as well as tender in their love, and prone to think the god of their idolatry should be the universal fetich. Even the best and sweetest of women are capable of demanding human sacrifices in honor of their love.

Ranke's death, therefore, weighed on Joyce's mind not a whit; nor did Deane's silence at the time. That appeared venal, since if there had been

need to speak he would have spoken, even as now. That which afflicted her was her own position—or more accurately, lack of position toward this man whom she loved with all her warm, loyal heart, and whom she felt convinced loved her as well. She was proud of him—proud of his honor, his truth, his sterling manhood. To her it seemed a grand and glorious thing, this voluntary surrender of himself. In her love and agitation she could not recognize it for the simple act of justice it was, but glorified it into heroism of the first degree. Deane would have been a craven if he had held his peace, but that fact escaped her, and she laid her head down on her pillow and cried as if her heart would break because she could not burn incense openly before him for speaking.

Why had not Deane put into words the love which she felt was in his heart, which she had read clearly in his eyes, so that the right to stand by him in this trouble might have been hers? She so longed to encourage and uphold him in the sight of men with her love and faith; to rally to his support before the whole world. It was hard to be obliged to stand aloof from her lover, to be obliged to hold down the impulses of her heart because spoken language had not defined the position! The cause of an ordinary acquaintance, even that of a stranger, she might champion with full vigor, but not this cause of the man she loved, for very self-consciousness, for very knowledge of the fact that she who felt herself everything to him, in the eyes of the world was still nothing to him.

It was maddening to think of! It was being homeless and unprotected, like a crustacean quit of one shell and not yet accoutered with another. Her maiden serenity had been stripped from her and there was in its place no security of betrothal. Love and womanly dignity stood apart, two masters to be served.

If *only* he had spoken before this horrible complication arose! Now, she could see quite plainly that he must, perforce, remain silent until after this trial, and—who knew?—perhaps then for all time.

As recollection of the coming ordeal obtruded itself Joyce's thoughts became less purely personal. She sat up on the edge of the bed and pushed back the hair from her forehead. Then she picked up the letter and read it over again, but with a totally different idea dominant.

The concise statement of the belief prevalent in the mountains of the venom of a "blue-gum's" bite struck on her notice at once as a point of importance. It appealed to her imagination also, and touched the dormant superstition which seems an integral part of all Southern peoples. Where had she heard about this thing before? Had it been only among the negroes? Could it be possible for the saliva of a human being to become charged with poison like that of a brute? She knew that the bite of a horse was considered dangerous, even when the animal was not afflicted with rabies. Not three miles from Manitoba there lived a white man who had lost his arm from the bite of a horse—not a hydrophobic horse either, but simply an ill-tempered

one. Old Dr. Hatton had told them of the case and had said that if the arm had not been amputated, the man must have died. It had swollen to twice its natural size and nothing would reduce it, and the wound had turned livid, with a horrid discharge. Once Fred had refused an apparently superb bargain in horse-flesh, because he happened to know that the beast offered had the biting habit.

Where *had* she heard about "blue-gums" before? Not for years, she knew, but she *had* heard of them And now she came to clinch her mind to the matter, she remembered to have seen one—a light mulatto woman with purplish-blue gums, long ago when she was a child, down at Aunt Venus's house. She would go at once and question Aunt Venus about it. What that old woman did not know about popular superstitions must be non-existent.

Joyce bathed her face and tidied her hair, and then restored Rutherford's letter to its envelope, leaving her room with it in her hand. Of course this thing would be discussed in the family. There was no reason why it should not be, nor had Joyce either wish or intention of suggesting any. She would meet the talk on neutral ground, as it were, and trust to her woman's wit and intuitions for the salvation of both her secret and her loyalty. So she arranged with herself, tucking her head in a bush, after the manner of women and ostriches, and utterly oblivious of the fact that she had already copiously betrayed herself to her brother, and that her sister-in-law, being another woman, would not be easily hood-winked.

As she passed the door of the children's rooms she looked in to assure herself that her forgetfulness of the beef-tea had brought no harm to her little nephew. The child was sleeping easily, his breathing quiet, and his forehead and hands moist with perspiration. The little bowl on the stand beside the bed testified that his wants had been attended to, and his case seemed altogether satisfactory. In the inner room she could hear Louise moving softly about, ministering to one of the other children. Joyce glanced at the clock and discovered that it still wanted an hour to the time for the doctor's visit. Craige was, as far as in him lay, punctuality itself, but she could run across to the cabin for a few words with Aunt Venus, and be back in plenty of time to help Louise recapitulate variations in symptoms. She put Rutherford's letter on the medicine stand where her sister would be certain to find it and went out.

The cabin occupied by the old colored woman stood in a small enclosure, one side of which was formed by the garden fence, through which a short cut led to the cabin. Aunt Venus herself was an institution on the Manitoba estate, having arisen with it from chaos, Joyce was wont to maintain. She claimed to be a century old and her looks bore her out, for she was as crumpled and dark as the underside of a drying fungus. Her body had, to all appearances, mummified, but her faculties were still in tolerable repair, and her memory was really remarkable. She had been past all usefulness long before Joyce opened her eyes to the light of day, but

she enjoyed the comforts of her home, and was carefully looked after by the white family, on the strength of traditional merit. Her personal wants were attended to by her great grand-daughter, herself an elderly woman, who lived rent free and was partially supported by the Ruthvens in requital for her ministrations to her own progenitress.

Joyce had always been great friends with Aunt Venus since the days when she had been small enough to creep through a hole in the garden palings with her doll and tea-cups in her apron to "play party" on the little peck-measure turned bottom upward beside the cabin hearth, and hearken avidly to the old woman's stories of old slavery days, of which Joyce herself had no recollection.

Joyce found the old woman alone, her guardian having temporarily betaken herself to the house kitchen for a dish of gossip with the cook, and a customary bucket of buttermilk. The fire was bright and the cabin neat, as was the misnomered old crone herself, who sat in a big wooden arm-chair in the ingle-nook, with a white cotton cap on her head with a flapping border which set off the blackness of her countenance as a frilled petticoat sets off the ebony polish of a slipper. She had had her dinner and post-meridian pipe, and so was in fine conversational trim when Joyce, after the usual salutations and inquiries, seated herself in the split-bottomed rocking-chair opposite. After a discursive preamble, the young lady headed the talk into the past and recalled to the mind of her hostess having met, a great many years before in this very cabin, a

tall yellow woman, who had made an impression on her.

"I remember her because she had such a curious mouth," Joyce explained. "Her gums looked as if they had been bruised—all purple and mottled. What made her that way, Aunt Venus?"

"Lord, honey! Dat's de way she was born," the old woman responded. "She was one 'blue-gum' nigger, she was. In Africy, whar we-all come from, dat's de sign o' king blood I been hear folks say. De royal nations, dey have blue gums an' dat's de way dey gits power—out'n deir own moufs. Back yonder in slavery times dar was two or three dem sort o' people 'bout here—'cendants of dem whar was fetched over. Dat 'ooman you see'd was one, an' her uncle was 'nother. Prudence—dat's what her name was—she b'long'st to dem Hatchets whar lived t'other side o' Winock befo' de War, an' endurin' of it, an' moved away to Richmond sence. We-all owned her uncle fur awhile."

"I don't seem to remember him," Joyce observed. "What was his name?"

The old woman chuckled.

"Inco'se you don't, honey! You fust opened yo' eyes dis side de Kingdom endurin' of de War, you 'member. An' yer grandpa he got shet o' Wolfe some fifteen or twenty years afore yo' pa was married. Wolfe, he war named arter some gin'el or 'nother, I've hearn tell, didn't natu'ally belong to de plantation nohow. Ole Mars'r took him in fur a mighty sorry debt—'twas jus' Wolfe, or nothin'. He got shet o' him arter 'while."

"What did he look like?"

The young lady's tone was interested.

"Prudence favored him some, bein' his niece. But he was lighter complected 'en she was—had mo' white blood in him. Wolfe had pewter-colored eyes too, an' Prudence's was black. He was a middlin' smart hand, Wolfe was—a stone-mason, an' capable, whenst he got ready to be. He laid off dese here rock fences 'pon de place an' holped to put up most of 'em, gate-pos'es an' all."

"If he was such a valuable man why did grandfather part with him, Aunt Venus? Do you know?"

Joyce put her question with intention.

Venus hesitated.

"Wolfe wanted to own hisse'f," she admitted, after a moment. 'An' 'blue-gums' is danger'us anyhow. Folks is 'feared on 'em, an' when dey is mean an' interruptious dar ain't no tellin' how interruptious dey kin be. Some 'blue-gums' is natu'ally meaner'n others, an' Wolfe he was de meanest one ever I seed. Allus a fuss an' a fracus 'pon de place whar he was all de time. De overseer even was 'feared o' him same as we-all was. Ole Mars'r was mighty well satisfied to git shet o' Wolfe at las', smart as he was."

"What made you afraid of him?"

"His mouf, honey! Ain't you never hearn 'bout dat? 'Blue-gums' is p'isen—rank p'isen! Deir bite kin kill folks de same as rattle-snake's do, or dry-lan' moccasin's in blind time. Wolfe know'd dat we-all know'd he was p'isen an' he jus' natu'ally kep' de plantation stirred up from en' to en', *all* de time."

"Did he ever bite anybody?"

"Not to git it proved 'pon him, he didn't," the old woman declared acidly. "He was too cunnin' for dat. Two chil'en died mighty cur'us do an' nobody couldn't tell what ailed 'em—ole Miss, nor de doctor, no nobody. De doctor was plumb bothered kase he 'low'd dat ef dar'd been mad dogs gwine 'round he'd a thought dem chil'en died o' 'phobia. Dar mammys an' de balance of us reckoned dat Wolfe had bit 'em, or spit on 'em, or somethin', but we was 'fear'd to say so."

Joyce shuddered. "Was there no sign on them anywhere?" she questioned pitifully. "No way of telling?"

The old woman shut her lips together over her toothless gums, and nodded her head solemnly.

"We-all s'arched de pore little bodies arter de bref was gone," she admitted slowly. "An' we *foun' what we looked for;* but we was 'fear'd to tell."

"You ought to have told," Joyce declared positively. "It was your duty to have gone straight to my grandfather and told him all you suspected."

"Dat wouldn't er been no use," was the instant counter declaration. "Heap o' white folks don't b'l'eve in nigger say-so bekase niggers is mostly ig'n'ant o' things whar *dey* know. Dey hardly ever study out dat niggers, bein' a dif'ent sort o' nation, may be 'quainted wid things dey *don't* know. Ef ole Mars'r had been liable to b'l'eve we-all enouf to have Wolfe took out an' shot like er mad-dog, so well an' so good. But ef he'd jus' b'l'eved we-all enouf to have Wolfe whipped, dat would'r made things wus-

ser. Wolfe would'r turned in an' chaw'd right an' lef' befo' anybody could'r stopped him."

Joyce was fain to admit the force of the reasoning. All this barbarism revolted, and at the same time had a horrible fascination for her. Half-sick, yet morbidly curious, she inquired if the "blue-gum" had done any more harm upon the plantation. He had bitten a mule, the old woman informed her, and forthwith described the scene with relish.

"'Twas our ole white Judy muel," she related earnestly. "An' she war a middlin' good muel in dry weather, an' on feilds whar 'twan't no water. She war foaled in May, an' couldn't help herse'f, I reckon, but no matter how nor why, in harness or out, under de saddle, or under de meal-bag, whenst Judy got hoof in runnin' water down she'd lay right in it, an' wallow an' squeal an' kick her heels up. 'Twar p'isen aggervatin', an' the overseer used to sw'ar he'd git ole Mars'r to sell her ev'ry time she done it. But she war a good muel, 'ceptin' dat one meanness, an' we-all was used to her an' know'd how to make allowance. Soon arter Wolfe come to de plantation, befo' we-all got a notion of de sort o' creeter he was, some o' de boys was fallowin' for wheat in de big home meadow-feild. We was pushed to git done, so 'stead o' takin' de teams back to de stable at twelve o'clock, de overseer tole de boys jus' to onhitch one muel an' send up for truck to de house, an' feed in de field. Wolfe was de man 'p'inted to go, an' he happened to be plowin' Judy. Jus' for a frolic dem boys wouldn't say nothin' 'tall to him 'bout'n ole Judy's trick, knowin' he'd have to cross

de big creek on his way to de stable and lookin' to have a good laugh.

"Dar's a place in de feild, as you mind, honey, whar you kin git a mighty good view of de fordin' place, an' all dem boys draw'd together dar to have thar fun. Well, Judy she trotted mighty nimble—lippety-click, same as a rabbit, twell she got to de runnin' water. She know'd she had to cross it an' look like she 'joiced, bekase de minute her hoofs got wet right good she squealed out, like she's happy with religion, an' down she laid, an' rolled clean over. Wolfe he was throw'd off'n her in de fu'st double an' got ducked, heels an' crown, an' dem boys in de feild jus' holler'd! Ole Judy look so funny—an' Wolfe too.

"Dey quit laughin' in a minute tho', for Wolfe he scrambled up to his feet an' jerked ole Judy to her'n an' whirled in on her an' bit her twice, once on de nake an' once on de shoulder. Den de boys 'membered dat Wolfe was a 'blue-gum' an' was skeer'd nigh to de'f, knowin' what was liable to happen. An' sure enouf befo' 'long dat muel was a sight to see. She war all swollen up an' had lumps about under her skin, an' suffered! 'Twar plumb pitiful to see an' hear how dat pore critter *did* suffer. She'd keep still fur awhile, shakin' all over like she was in a fit, an' den she'd squeal an' holler like she'd go plumb destracted wid pain. Ole Mars'r an' de overseer worked over her out'n de horse-doctor book, wid drenches an' what-not, but dey couldn't do nothin' 'tall to ease her, an' arter while she got so bad off dat ole Mars'r just draw'd his pistol an' shot her.

He couldn't b'ar to see a pore dumb creeter suffer so. Wolfe took'n' tole Mars'r that he tu'ned Judy loose to graze while de men-folks was eatin' dinner an' he reckoned a rattlesnake must'r struck her. An' we-all let it stand at dat, bekase we was 'fear'd o' Wolfe bitin' some more o' we-all."

The old woman reached down into a basket of chips and kindling-wood which stood beside her chair and replenished the fire. Outside the March sunshine lay on the earth and the sap was beginning faintly to stir in root and fibre; but old blood moves sluggishly and needs to be comforted. Joyce moved her chair backward, out of range of the heat, and watched the flames crinkle and curl around the fresh fuel. Her imagination was at work constructing pictures, demolishing them, and substituting others still more strange and barbarous. What matter whether this thing were scientific verity or not so long as people *believed* in it, and through that belief admitted it to potentiality? She believed in it herself, and her very soul sickened and shuddered at thought of her lover struggling for life with a human viper. Was not this very story she had been listening to proof? Had the *mule* ever heard stories of the virulence of a "blue-gum's" bite? And yet from the effects of that bite the animal had died. Here was no case of excited imagination reflecting itself on corporeal substance, but of such substance affected through its own medium—poison in the body, not on the mind, had been the death-cause here. Superstition could not have affected the physical tissues of a mule.

"What became of this Wolfe, Aunt Venus?" she questioned after a moment, feeling vindictively that the creature had been rightly named.

"He was so hard to git along wid, honey," the old crone responded, "dat Mars'r got wore plumb out wid him. He tried to sell him 'bout in de neighborhood, but didn't nobody want him 'ceptin' 'twas hisse'f. Mars'r never would sell none o' his folks to traders, like so many done, bekase he was 'fear'd dey wouldn't git treated right; so what to do wid Wolfe he didn't know. Dat 'blue-gum' was de smartes' sort o' nigger, like I tole you, an' mighty nigh white, to look at, an' he argufied an' 'suaded wid Mars'r twell Mars'r 'greed to sell him to hisse'f. Arter he got dat fixed de way he wanted, he sobered down real ste'ddy an' worked at his trade an' got money yuther ways an' bought an' paid for hisse'f inside o' three ye'r. Den Mars'r had de freedom papers made out all regular, an' Wolfe jobbed about an' prospered mighty well. He was a good-lookin' man wid his mouf shut, an' arter 'while a sorry po' white 'ooman took up wid him. Dey couldn't git married bekase dar was a law agin it, but dey lived together right peacable, an' Wolfe quit interruptin' folks more'n was his natur'. Dey had two chil n whar was in-about white, to look at, an' whenst de youngest one, de little gal, was five ye'r old, her daddy got hisse'f killed blastin' in a stone quarry, an' all his own color was glad of it. Arter Wolfe was buried de 'ooman sold out what truck she had an' took her chil'n an' moved clean away frum here."

Joyce rose to go. It was almost time for Dr. Hatton's visit now, and she knew that her sister needed her. As she turned to leave the cabin, after making parting salutations, she put a concluding question. Had the ex-slave's children blue-gums also?

Aunt Venus thought that one of them had—the boy. There had been several years between the children, and Wolfe junior had been a sizable chap when taken from the neighborhood. The little girl had been uncommonly pretty, as mixed children frequently are. She had light hair and gray eyes, like her mother. What had become of the family, the old woman had never heard. It had all happened many years ago, before Joyce's father had left college.

The young lady returned to the house thinking very hard. And the first chance she got poured the story into her sister-in-law's ear, by whom, in turn, it was repeated to Ruthven, who felt himself moved to curiosity sufficient to make him cast a backward glance over the plantation books as kept during his grandfather's time. Under a certain date, pretty early in the century, he found an entry which spoke of the acquisition by the elder Ruthven of "an able-bodied male mulatto" as indemnity for debt. There was a full description of the man appended, as was usual in those days of human chattelship. He was catalogued as "a 'blue-gum' negro, very light in complexion; answered to the name of Wolfe."

The senior Ruthven had been a very systematic man, and a bit further on was an entry which read:

"My mulatto boy Wolfe, very capable and satisfactory as a work-hand, but quarrelsome in the quarters and unpopular with the other negroes. Seems an underhand, bad-natured fellow. Must keep my eye on him." After that there was little mention of Wolfe, save in the work entries, until the detailed description of the singular loss of "my white mule Judy," all of whose symptoms, and the treatment employed, was duly set forth, with the appendix, "Wolfe and the other negroes maintain that the brute was snake-bitten; but, to me, the case presented difference. The poison charge seemed heavier, and there were marks on her neck and shoulder a snake never made. Have given orders that the other mules be watched, and also the curs about the plantation. The marks were those of teeth."

Sometime later came the entry of the agreement of sale between master and man, with the regularly recurring entries of payments made, until the affair culminated in the declaration: "I this day signed manumission papers for my yellow boy Wolfe, who will henceforth go under the name of Wolfe Judson."

There was, however, in the farm records no mention of the popular superstition connected with "blue-gums."

CHAPTER XIX.

TUCKAHOE "CO'TE-HOUSE."

The village of Tarrytown, which attains full dignity of nomenclature only on maps where a tiny black dot represents the county-seat of Tuckahoe, nestles itself in a long funnel-shaped valley, which opens out handsomely and to considerable extent. On either side the vanguard of foot-hills uprear themselves, range beyond range, shading wondrously in beauty from purple to amethyst, from amethyst to blue, until, in far away spaces, mountain peaks blend softly with clouds and appear to lose identity in distance.

Through the country-side the place is simply designated the "Co'te-House"; but is held to be a metropolis of importance to the commonwealth. Its houses, including stables, hen-houses and negro cabins, foot up to about four hundred, and its population, in the recent census, would have showed valuable increase and set itself off handsomely had not the census-taker been an evil-minded man, given over utterly to lying.

A pretty place is the Court-House village, bowery and sweet-smelling in the gentler seasons of the year, for trees abound, and so do old-fashioned gardens, rich in garniture of boxwood, sprucely

trimmed, in hedges of Scotch broom, and lilacs, white and purple; rich also in "snow-ball" bushes, and tangles of calycanthus, known to the commonality as "shrubs" and, erroneously, supposed to thrive only about houses wherein the women wear the breeches. And of all seasons, the place is prettiest in April, for then lilies of the valley, clove pinks and lilacs are a-bloom, making the gardens all like daughters of the king, full of comeliness within and of goodly savor. Then, too, the yards are newly swept, and show all velvety green, and the long rows of locust trees, which shadow all the lane-like streets, have shaken out their snowy tassels in great number, holding them aloft, like lovely censors, whose rich perfume is guerdon for the breeze.

The court-house itself, constructed of brick and roofed with native shingles, is a building of uncompromising squareness, intended doubtless to be typical of the justice administered within. It stands on an elevation near the center of the village, and is surrounded by an extensive lawn of soft velvety turf, handsomely studded with forest trees. Behind the court-house is the jail, a long, low structure of stone, whitewashed, and almost windowless. And to one side, in a detached building, is the office of the county-clerk, an official held in high esteem in ante-bellum days, but whose dignity has sadly lapsed under stress of modern innovations.

The broad brick wall surrounding the green formed the favorite lounging place of juvenile citizens, of both colors, when court was in session, for it gave coigne of vantage for over-sight of the extem-

pore booths erected with empty barrels and bits of board by the negro venders of fried chicken, soda biscuit, pies, persimmon beer, and the thick, glazed, slippery looking ginger-bread peculiar to court-house vicinities. The wall overlooked also the open lot whereon horse trading was done and sheriff sales held, in intervals when the public mind needed distraction from the cares of state, so that it was deservedly popular.

The semi-annual sessions of Circuit Court were great occasions in the village, before which the monthly convening of County Court paled into utter insignificance. The village put on its bravest front, the shop-keepers set out such store as they possessed of cigars and smoking tobacco, the women washed windows and hung fresh curtains, and the maidens got out their braveries; for, who knew, there might be legal strangers to impress, and the local bar could always be counted on to come out strong. About the place, mingling in autumn with the perfume of ripening fruit, and in spring with that of flowers, would steal rich odors of cooking, smell of roasting joints and poultry, simmering fruit and spices, warm browning of cakes in the oven, and all such goodly savors, for these were seasons of hospitality, and every household must make itself ready for guests, both stranger and local.

Circuit Court weeks were big times, too, for the old "Buck-horn Tavern," as the hostlery of the village had been called since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. This was a rambling frame structure, said to ante-date, by many years,

the court-house, with which it stood cheek by jowl, so to speak. It was furnished with deep verandas on every side, whereon were split-bottom chairs in variety, some with rockers and some without, but all sufficiently comfortable to insure occupation in sunny weather. Above the lintel was a huge branching pair of antlers, trophy of a stag of ten, and used time out of mind as the cognizance of the house. There was a tale about the shooting of that buck that would have done credit to Munchausen, but the villagers, to a man, loyally upheld it, while in the speech of the proprietor of the place it was a very bulwark of public popularity.

Seated on the portion of the tavern veranda which overlooked the village street was a group of mountaineers in various attitudes indicative of relaxation and comfort. They had come down from the heights to be present at the trial of Deane Rutherford for the killing of Wolfe Ranke, and were mightily excited thereover. The release of Jim Trotter had spread the story abroad, and Deane's old neighborhood could not contain itself for interest, or command language sufficient for the requirements of comment and speculation.

Every incident of Deane's career that was known to them, from the cutting of his first tooth onward, was exhaustively canvassed, and it was really astonishing the impression which trivialities connected with him appeared to have made. Instances of violence of temper were narrated of his grandfather and his father, as well as of the young fellow himself, and people would remind each other of how

many fights Deane senior had had, and of how many times Sam had knocked a man down, before they brought the conversation around to this present Deane and his remembered escapades. The Rutherfords had always been "a servidgerous nation, fiery in thar tempers and flashy with thar fists," according to the popular dictum. Nor were they hardly judged for it, such peculiarities being thoroughly in sympathy with the civilization around them.

The family had been well liked in the district, moreover, and was connected by marriage with a good many other families in it, although not very closely in its present representative. Deane's father, in special, had been immensely popular, partly because of social and other gifts, partly because of ties of blood, which in the South are acknowledged to the uttermost ramification of remoteness, but mostly because of his musical ability. Sam Rutherford and his "old lady" were still sorely missed in their old haunts, and Jim Trotter and his banjo could in no wise supply their place.

In addition to this Deane had been liked himself, and despite his infirmities of temper had made for himself the reputation of being a "middlin' clever, straight-for'red fellow, 'thout'n no meanness, nor low-lived crookedness in him, no more'n his daddy had." Public opinion would have held Sam Rutherford's boy entirely justified in his deed, and have set strongly in his favor but for one, to them, hideous fact connected with the affair—to wit, the burning of the body. It is a curious commentary on human nature where the line will be drawn. These moun-

taineers cared no more for the slaughter of the man than if he had been a worm stepped on, and yet they revolted from and resented the cremation of his insensate remains. It seemed to them not only an unfair advantage to take of that which was defenseless, but an evidence of cowardice as well. Their code required that a man should stand up bodily for that which he had done and be prepared to justify it with thews and sinews if need were.

Any other course was considered derogatory to his manhood. And, like their betters, they were all the more dogged in maintaining a standard in that, in this instance, it could by no possibility be even covertly applied to themselves.

Simon Trueheart, the storekeeper, who had not scrupled to appropriate the residue of Ranke's effects, at his own price, in discharge of a debt on which his rate of interest was already something like a hundred per cent, grew quite sentimental over the "blue-gum's" funeral pyre.

"Look-like Deane mout'r buried him," Simon averred, dumping a couple of pounds of sugar into the scales, and removing them before the balance settled, discoursing to his customer craftily the while. "Look-like he might have tole folks out squar' an' orderly, an' done his jewty by one he war hinderin' frum doin' a good part by hisse'f. That thar pore lonesome creeter war *en*titled to a fun'al, an' a grave whar fit him, if he war *en*titled to anything. Ranke war'n't, you may say, a pop'lar man in life, nor over an' above agreeable to most folks,

but his due six-foot o' ground war *his'n*, and he never got it."

"No, he didn't," acquiesced the customer, too much interested to observe that he was getting short-weight. "Nor nothin' like it. He jus' got a hole, belike, no bigger'n would do to set out an apple-tree in. An' that was too big fur what was left o' him."

The storekeeper thumped the bundle down on the counter and opened his cash-drawer, in search of change.

"Killin' have got to be done once in awhile," he declared. "An' thar's some situations thar ain't no other way out of. I ain't faultin' Deane for slaughterin' Wolfe Ranke if so be he war obleeged to. All that will come out at his trial an' I'll hold back jedgment thar till I git ther evidence. Ranke could be a nasty cuss an' plumb *de*spisable whenst he got ready. I ain't disputin' that. Nor I ain't disputin' t'other fellow's right to do ther slaughterin'. What goes agin me air takin' advantage arter a man's dead. Whilst both air livin' it air nip an' tuck, man agin man, an' ther best wins; but arter one of 'em air dead *an'* helpless 'tis dif'ent."

The storekeeper's attitude was irreproachable, despite the solid advantage accruing from his own posthumous settlement with Ranke. He felt it so. And also that he was voicing the sentiments of the community.

"Yes, sirree!" he repeated, emphatically. "It air mighty dif'ent. A man natu'ally looks to be laid out straight an' orderly with all whar he fetched

into ther world, an' a leetle more added to it, boxed up conformable in his coffin. An' he looks to have a neighborly buryin', an' to be planted, side an' side, with folks whar knows him, so whenst gettin'-up time comes at Jedgment Day he may rise decent an' in comp'ny. A man have a right to look for this, an' he *do* look for it."

Again the customer endorsed the statement with acclamation.

"That's so!" he asserted. "That cert'n'y is *so*. A man natu'ally do object to bein' scorched up to a crisp an' made so little of that folks ain't got ther heart to fit him out with a full-sized grave. He have a right to object with Jedgment Day ahead to look out for, an' ther surety that all ther neighbors, men *an'* wimmen, will be thar too, lookin' an' nudgin', an' whisperin' 'bout ther show this one makes an' t'other one. What sort o' figger, does you reckon, them thar pore harf-burnded bones will make twistin' out'n that thar leetle, scrougeous hole in ther clearin', higgledy-piggledy, every-which-er-way, whenst ole Gab'el blows ther horn fur dead folks to git up an' travel? It air scan'elous! And Ranke was a full-grow'd, able-bodied man, ef he was a 'blue-gum.' Deane didn't have no business takin' sich a mean advantage."

The unsightliness of the suggestion gave it weight and adhesive power, and the feeling grew that the defunct "blue-gum" had been treated with less than human consideration. The idea that Ranke's ability to make a comely showing for all eternity had been gratuitously interfered with, aroused commiseration

for him. Through much discussion of the situation the public attitude toward Deane grew not exactly adverse, but cold and critical.

The carping spirit was encouraged by Jim Trotter, who, indeed, went out of his way to speak against Deane. Instead of being grateful for his own deliverance and appreciative of the fact that the young fellow had set himself to mend matters the instant he became aware that they required it, Trotter chose to consider himself a gravely abused man, whose situation was minus a palliating circumstance. He had endured hardship and opprobrium; he had been heinously detained from business and family for the space of many moons; he had suffered loss and inconvenience, in body and mind, solely and absolutely through Deane Rutherford's fault. This was the attitude he assumed, and he clove to it, feeling sore and vindictive and giving his feelings air in season and out. There was, in his estimation, no name too censorious to be applied to Deane, and no reprobation too severe to be meted out to him. When reminded that if the young man had elected to remain silent his—Trotter's—tight place might have proven difficult to wiggle out of, he would refuse to regard the matter from this stand-point at all, alleging as counter-quit that "thar wouldn't never have been no tight place for nobody, but for Deane Rutherford's cussedness an' mean, interruptious temper."

And when it was additionally pointed out that not Deane's temper, but that of Miriam Watts was responsible for "sickin' the law-dogs" on *him*, all

that would be elicited would be a contemptuous "shucks!" and the quite gratuitous insistence that Miriam was a woman, and that "wimmin-folks war'n't 'sponsible, n'other war'n't b'ilt to be."

Indeed Trotter's clemency toward the immediate agent in his incarceration, in contrast with his venom against its remoter cause, was calculated to excite surprise. So far from falling upon his malevolent neighbor, beak and claw, so to speak, and verbally rending her, Trotter appeared to have little, or nothing, to say on that part of the subject, and actually to bear, or at all events to express, no malice whatever. The bucolic code by no means inculcates the turning of the other cheek to the smiter, so that Trotter's treatment of his calumniator aroused considerable comment, which was increased when it was discovered that he had actually gone out of his way to accommodate the woman several times since his liberation. Trotter was a "perfessor o' religion" it was true, but primitive theology retains much of its pristine ferocity, and deals vastly more with cursing and denunciation than with peace and loving-kindness. None dreamed therefore of setting down Trotter's magnanimity to a change of heart. Their speculations anent it were purely mundane.

A small contingent, composed of fellows like Nat and 'Bijah, who had been his playmates, and headed by the blacksmith, stood squarely by Deane, explaining the burning on a natural and common-sense hypothesis, and treating with scorn all insinuations in his disfavor. The impression Deane had

made on his old friends during their recent visit to Winock held firm and was communicated, as far as possible. A little genuine friendliness was proving, as it usually does, bread cast upon the waters, and three men among his old associates were standing cheerily by ready to do Deane yeoman service. They kept their mouths from over-much discourse and their eyes and ears open, having plans of their own to put into effect, and large confidence in themselves as factors.

They came early down to the "Co'te-House" and established themselves within easy reach of everybody, usually occupying chairs on the veranda of the Buck-horn Tavern when court was not in session.

With them also had come down the iconoclast, already mentioned, a fellow named Terry Smoot, who had attached himself to the party for company more than anything else, and who had, just now, a bee in his bonnet, the buzzing of which was like to drive all hands entirely distracted.

As they sat at ease, over-looking the court-house green, Smoot had his idea out, like a Juny-bug tied by the leg with a bit of string, and was exercising it. Around the corner from them, in an arm-chair with his heels on the balustrade, sat a gentleman smoking. He was a stranger to the mountaineers and they paid no attention to him.

"No, sir," Smoot asserted dogmatically. "T'ain't never been *proved* on Wolfe—not nigger blood haven't. An' folks ain't got no right to fasten such a thing as that on a man 'thout'n proof, an' good proof too. Them lawyer chaps have been trackin'

it, huntin' up a fam'ly fur Ranke, better'n three months now, an' they don't look to have made much headway at it. Leastways that fellow Sinclair ain't, him that had Jim Trotter's case, workin' it up. Middlin' smart chap too, he is, folks say about here."

"He ain't smart like Meredith," Nat Clarke hastened to assert, seeking to break cover in a new direction and so escape from that bane of listeners, which the merriest, as well as the wisest of his race, aptly characterizes as "damnable iteration."

"No, he ain't," promptly supplemented the blacksmith. "He's a likely colt enough, Sinclair is, an' will pull well for off-horse; but Deane's head was level whenst he got old man Trave in the lead. I sesso soon as I hearn his team named over. Wonder how he done it? Meredith ain't show'd up in a criminal case for better'n ten ye'r. It's ten ye'r sence Woodchuck Bailey was jailed 'long o' carryin' on his granddad's feud, an' shootin' Bill Lennox, ain't it? Meredith defended Woodchuck in co'te an' got him off, an' then whirled in on him outside an' gin him such a tongue-lashin' 'bout'n onnayborliness that Woodchuck all but boo-hooed whar he stood."

"Throw'd his shootin'-iron in ther river I've hearn tell," chuckled Nat Clarke. "An' fetched an' carried for Bill's widow same as he done for his own folks, plumb twell she got married ag'in."

Smoot was not to be toled away from his own interest by any such extraneous matter, however. He waited calmly for an opening and then thrust it upon them again.

"Woodchuck was jailed six months afore Wolfe Ranke come by his end," he announced, as though the original query had been put to him. "I mind the day the news o' the shootin' circled round. Me, an' Jim Trotter, an' Ranke an' two or three more was settin' about in Trueheart's sto'. Ranke sot on a barrel by the door, cross-legged. The sun shone on him squar' an' I took notice o' his look partic'lar bekase of the talk that was always travelin' 'bout his color. His skin was as white as what mine is."

"That ain't nothin'," retorted Nat, glancing sourly at the speaker's sallow and sun-burned visage. "I've seed a sight o' mulatto chil'n an' gals heap whiter'n you is, Smoot—to look at."

"What in thunder makes Smoot so durned pertic'-ler 'bout'n Ranke's color?" fretfully demanded 'Bijah, addressing himself to space. "A body would think the 'blue-gum' was his kinfolks."

"No, they wouldn't n'other," grinned Smoot. "Ranke's eyes war'n't my color. If kin goes by favors, he was closer by you 'en me, 'Bijah. Thar's a monkey for yer jackass."

'Bijah's pewter-colored eyes lowered and he swore roundly. The other men laughed and resigned themselves to hearing Smoot out.

"This here air the p'int I'm aimin' to make," that worthy proclaimed, with as much zest as if he had not done it fifty times already. "Everybody knows that the bite o' a 'blue-gum' *nigger* air rank p'isen. So if Wolfe was a nigger as well as a 'blue-gum,' an' him an' Deane got in a scuffle, an' Deane kilt him

to keep from gitten hisse'f bit all to pieces, he war justified in doin' it an' have got a good case."

"I reckon so," interjected 'Bijah, disagreeably. "Who in thunder do you s'pose would hold tharselves steady an' let a damned p'isenous 'blue-gum' gnaw on 'em?"

Smoot waved the interruption calmly aside and proceeded.

"Just like I was sayin'. If black-blood air a true bill agin Ranke t'other fellow's case is about made out. But if 'tain't a true bill, or can't be proved a true bill, the whole thing's quashed, an' the defense will have to come in on another track. If Ranke was a full-blooded white man, then he war'n't p'isen an' his bite wouldn't kill no more'n yours or mine. In fact he wouldn't *bite* in a scuffle at all. He'd be above such a doggish trick as that thar."

"Ever see a white man with blue-gums?"

The same pertinent query had been put ten years before in almost the same words by the same man.

Smoot varied his rejoinder.

"No; but I ain't seed all the nations o' the y'earth, nor you ain't n'other."

"I've seed *two* of 'em," the blacksmith retorted sharply. "An' one's liable to have blue-gums, an' t'other one ain't. How do you s'pose now that Ranke's gums got that venomous color if he war'n't born so?"

"Mout'r been bruised."

"Mout'r been the devil!" with derisive emphasis. "Whyn't you reckon he painted 'em up reg'lar for pretty, or polished 'em off with lamp black? I

know'd Wolfe Ranke risen twenty ye'r an' that thar color hung on to his gums from start to finish. Never faded, nor never changed. Right good holdin' for a *bruise*, warn't it?"

The laugh was against the caviler at the popular belief this time.

The gentleman around the corner threw away the stump of his cigar, took his boots from the balustrade and rose. From the door of the clerk's office a man with a green bag in his hand was emerging. He walked slowly and slouched a trifle forward; with his disengaged hand he clasped the opposite shoulder, manipulating it with mechanical touches. The gentleman on the veranda watched him cross the lawn toward the entrance gate and then turned to the mountaineers with the inquiry if that were not Lawyer Meredith?

Receiving an affirmative reply he uttered a hasty word of acknowledgment, turned away and ran down the veranda steps as though in a hurry. The group watched him curiously and a few moments later beheld him touch the lawyer lightly on the arm, and apparently introduce himself.

CHAPTER XX.

"I KNOW'D HE WERE P'ISENOUS!"

COURT convened on the second Monday in April, and all that day and the next was consumed in getting business on its legs, and in disposing of several unimportant cases which stood first on the docket. It was Wednesday therefore before the case of the Commonwealth vs. Deane Rutherford was called.

The interest excited by the trial was widespread, not only among the people with whom the principals in the affair had mostly to do, but among outsiders as well. The fact that the case turned on a popular superstition, so prevalent in some portions of the South as to have been tacitly accepted without any attempt at explanation or verification, invested it with peculiar interest for the legal profession, and the additional fact that the defence was to be conducted by Trave Meredith made it seem probable that the handling of the evidence and general summing up would be noteworthy. Deane's voluntary surrender and downright acknowledgment of the deed had, of course, shifted his case from the ordinary ground of "guilty or not guilty" to that of justification. What his counsel would have to do would be to divest the deed of criminality by proving beyond a peradventure that the killing had been purely in

self-defence. And in the popular as well as the legal estimation, this would have been no difficult matter but for the known fact that there had been money involved, and the ugliness of that seeming destruction of evidence by fire. True, Deane maintained that he had nothing to do with the burning; but as yet his simple statement stood unsupported by proof, and against it might be set his silence of ten years back.

It was on this point presumably that the prosecution would rest—on this and the fact that Wolfe Ranke had passed for a white man, which would of course militate against the value of the superstition. These two knots were the only ones the case presented, but they were accounted tight enough to test Meredith's power of disentanglement.

From the region round about for a considerable radius the people convened, flocking into the village in carriages, on horse-back and in ox-wagons. Mountaineers came by the dozen, with their families and without, and even the neighboring gentry were well represented. The editors of the "Tuckahoe Enterprise" and the "Winock Reflector" attended in person, getting into court by-times, and it was known to a few that a slim-built fellow in a tweed suit who occupied one of the window-seats was no less a person than the representative of a Montaubon daily. So much importance quite upset the local equilibrium, and the villagers began to preen themselves and fondly fancy that the days of Court-House supremacy were about to revive. The negro women, not in service, bustled about and

baked cakes and pies, and fried chicken galore, setting out their box and barrel booths beside the court-house wall with lavishness and splendor. And the very dogs in the streets, both resident and visiting, held their noses high and stepped about on tip-toe, curling their tails upward with an extra flourish.

It was a warm day and the court-room was full to over-flowing, even the benches beside the vestibule door, which in general were relegated to colored service, being freighted now with curious dames and damsels whose household occupations had compelled them to be late in coming. All the windows stood open to their limit, and the judge from his bench could see out, across heads, into lovely spaces where spring-bedecked branches waved greenly against a blue distance, and shadows appeared to dance and gambol, with fair witcheries of movement, over the emerald sward. On the earth lay the season's sunshine, heating it to germination and growth, and every vagrant breeze that loitered in at the windows, to see what these human atoms might be about, came ladened with pilfered sweets.

Court was opened with the customary preamble, during which the restless among the crowd whispered together, or indulged in ineffectual mesmeric passes at predatory wasps sailing through on forays. Belated young lawyers scurried into the bar where already their legal betters were established, and, after a moment, all eyes were turned to the door through which the self-arraigned man must enter.

Deane Rutherford, looking taller, squarer, better

appointed and more self-possessed than ever, came in quietly, accompanied by Mr. Voss as well as by the sheriff, and seated himself in the place indicated, within easy reach of his counsel. Something in his air and appearance impressed the people favorably and the looks bent upon him were more interested than curious. One of his father's old intimates nudged another with his elbow and whispered that "Sam Rutherford's boy hadn't lost the favor by bein' eddicated. He was the very spit-image o' his daddy yet." And the other, with a vague consciousness that in the likeness there was difference, responded that Deane was "like his daddy whenst Sam had the 'old lady' agin his cheek, an' the horsehair was a-talkin' to the strings;" thus symbolizing that this evolution gave the father's altitude for the son's foundation.

The case, in due sequence, was called, and after less haggling than usual, a jury was impaneled and sworn. Deane's glance rested on the faces of the twelve men whose judgment, or prejudices, must influence his future with a strange feeling of being alien to himself, as it were, and no longer the dominating factor in his own destiny. Six of the men were strangers to him, men who had moved in, or boys grown up since the days of his own familiarity with the district; three were villagers whose faces he seemed vaguely to remember, and the remaining three were Toby Blake, the blacksmith, Nathan Clarke, and Abijah Wheelwright, who had forborne from expressing opinions on the case all along, with the deliberate intention of thereby qualifying them-

selves for jury service. They regarded Deane now with unrecognizing stolidity, and an austerity of aspect which was calculated to convey the impression that their aloofness from interest in him, or his concerns, was antipodal. Deane's own face was correspondingly impassive, but his heart stirred warmly and a comforting feeling generated that he would get fair-play in the jury-room.

The Attorney for the Commonwealth, Abel Talcott by name, was an elderly man of considerable acumen. He was a social friend and professional foe of Meredith's, with whom he consorted to an unlimited extent, and generally in the opposition. The pair had been, intellectually, pitted against one another from boyhood, so that, cheek by jowl, with their affection for and honest appreciation of each other, had developed the habit of taking different views and sturdily maintaining them. The Ranke case had interested Talcott very little until the new development had brought Trave Meredith into it, but since that event he had thrown himself into it with vigor. Many years had passed since he and Trave had measured rapiers in open court, and he was minded to see what trick of fence remained to them both.

The case for the prosecution was opened up ably, Talcott knowing the value of first impressions. He set forth the facts concisely, as the prosecution viewed them, and then set himself to establish them one by one. First he took up Ranke, and showed them a lonely recluse, solitary in habit, unsocial in disposition, with no tender ties of kinship among

his neighbors, it was true, but harmless in intention and act, a respectable law-abiding citizen, living out his life on his own estate and in accordance with his own scheme, paying his way as an honest man should, asking no favors, and interfering with no one. Emphatically a man who was entitled to live as long as nature would permit and to die peacefully in his bed when his time came. This had not been, however, for the man had been stricken down and butchered on his own hearthstone.

But before he came to that part of the affair, Talcott averred, he wished to show the Court a few facts about the antecedence of the murdered man with which his old neighborhood appeared unfamiliar. In the first place nobody seemed to know positively where Ranke had come from. It was known that, in company with his father, during the period when both men were in the guerrilla service of the Confederacy, he had been seen in the Tuckahoe neighborhood. The woods, and especially the mountain regions bordering on West Virginia and Tennessee, had been full of bushwhackers in those days, so that the coming and going of the Rankes, father and son, had excited no special comment. Almost immediately after the close of the War, the son, Wolfe Ranke, had returned alone to Tuckahoe Mountain, bought a small tract of land and settled. Since that time the neighbors could account for the man themselves, and it was the period which antedated it which the lawyer proposed to touch on.

A mischievous idea in connection with the deceased had permeated the neighborhood and worked

ill to him. This idea—that Ranke was of mixed blood—was largely responsible for the isolation of his life, and for his unpopularity among his associates. Upon examination, the idea proved to be based solely upon the existence of a natural defect, or blemish, in the dead man's personal appearance, and a superstition connected in the public mind therewith. How Ranke came to have discolored gums, he, Talcott, not being omniscient, was not prepared to say, but that he was a full-blooded white man he felt confident of proving.

Then he put on the witness-stand a respectable-looking white man who gave his name as Mathew Warner, and claimed to be from a small village called Ludlow, across the border in North Carolina. He was a carpenter by trade and had lived in Ludlow all his life.

This man testified that Tom Ranke, father of Wolfe, had been born and raised also in his village. That there were a good many of the name about that place and that, while there were good and bad among them in the usual proportion, none had ever been accused of lawfully mixing the breed. Indeed such a thing would be impossible under the regulations of the State. Tom Ranke had been a middling sort of man, neither conspicuously thrifty nor the reverse. He had married the daughter, and only living child, of a white woman, also a resident of Ludlow, and his wife had died when their son Wolfe was a lad. There had been other children, but none had lived to grow up except Wolfe; for some reason they appeared to have been sickly.

Here the defense, by courtesy, interrupted to inquire the maiden name of Tom Ranke's wife, and whether her family had also been residents of the village for any length of time. And through the replies the Court learned that Ranke had met the young woman in Tennessee some months previous to their removal to Ludlow, and had fallen in love with her. It had been through Tom's influence that they had come. The name was Judson, and the elder woman was a widow, or claimed to be.

Was there any doubt of the widow Judson's color?

None whatever, the witness positively asserted. Mrs. Judson had been a fair woman with straight blond hair and gray eyes. Her daughter had light eyes also, but her hair had been curly and brown. Tom Ranke had black eyes and hair. The Rankes, as a family, in coloring were generally dark.

Did the witness know from what town, or county, in Tennessee the Judsons had migrated?

Certainly. They had come from Johnson County. The witness had heard it scores of times. Mrs. Judson was a still-mouthed woman and had seen trouble. She talked very little about her past, but was feeling and neighborly. There was an impression that she had been badly treated in some way, but whether by her dead husband, or her own family, or his, was not clearly defined. She had had another child, a son; but had lost him. She talked about the boy a good deal, and seemed to have set store by him. It was to please her that Melissa Ranke had named her first-born son Wolfe. It had been her father's name and her brother's.

One other question the defence put and then let the witness for the prosecution off for that time. Had Mrs. Tom Ranke discolored gums like her son?

No. Mrs. Tom Ranke's gums had been most healthily red, and her teeth had been regular and as white as a cherry blossom. She had been an uncommonly likely woman, Tom's wife had, and as pretty as a picture. She had been pious too, a great church-goer, and Tom had been wrapped up in her.

The witness then went on to tell that, after the death of his wife, Tom Ranke had "sort o' lost grip" and drifted about a bit, working here and there, but always taking his son with him. When Wolfe had been about grown, the War had broken out and father and son had enlisted. Tom had been killed somewhere in the valley of Virginia. And after the fighting was over Wolfe had settled on Tuckahoe Mountain here-away. Occasionally he would return to his old home and look about a bit, but not often. Wolfe was a queer, lonesome lot, and always had been from a child. His mother had always maintained that the discoloration of his gums was due to his grandmother's having nearly poisoned him accidentally when he was a baby. She had been a master hand to brew all sorts of truck and physic right and left, Mrs. Judson had.

Then Mr. Warner was allowed to step down, and the prosecution proved by the Rev. William Dodd, pastor of the Ludlow church, that Thomas Ranke and Melissa Judson had been duly and honorably united in wedlock, by himself, on such a day, in such a year, in the presence of witnesses, and under a

license regularly procured from the clerk of the county in which the contracting parties both resided.

So far so good, for the prosecution. Ranke's old neighbors began to ruminate and to feel that, perhaps, their former views anent him might need reconstruction. With bucolic clinging to formula, they began to consider that should Ranke be deprived of black blood the whole foundation of their faith would be destroyed. It was "blue-gum *niggers*" who were accounted venomous. With Ranke cleared of the imputation of admixture, his mother's explanation of the cause of his disfigurement might be based in verity. This would alter the case for Deane considerably. The killing of a poisonous creature who came ravening at one like a mad-dog was undeniably self-defense and must be recognized as such; but the butchery of an innocuous human being because of a rumpus over cards, at mildest, was man-slaughter.

Talcott did not attack the "blue-gum" superstition and hail it before the populace as a relic of barbarism conceived of prejudice and ignorance and nurtured by the same, as he might have done in a different place and among a different people. He was too clever a man and too astute a lawyer to prejudice his cause by making his audience feel themselves censured and ridiculed for crass credulity. There is nothing more uneasily sensitive than ignorance, interlined with conceit, which is its customary manifestation among the masses. Talcott knew his audiences to the finest fibre of their vanity, and so

he rebuked them not, neither scorned them. He simply set himself to show that certain notions they entertained were not applicable to the case in hand.

When fully satisfied that everything possible had been done to establish Ranke's claim to "a white man's chance," the lawyer turned his attention to the antecedence and characteristics of the dead man's destroyer. Out of the mouths of many witnesses he proved that the Rutherfords, for generations, had been a notoriously imperious, hot-tempered race, who could not brook being thwarted in any way, and who, when under the influence of passion, were prone to strike fiercely and without much regard for right or consequences. When it came to proving Deane's own inheritance of the family peculiarities, Jim Trotter was put on the stand and testified so vindictively to that gentleman's red-handed fury and "outdacious cussedness" when aroused, that the listeners who remembered Jim's own former intimacy with the object of his censure, could but marvel that he himself were living to tell the tale. Indeed Trotter proved so much, and so viciously, that the prosecuting attorney himself dispensed with his further testimony and turned him over to the cross-examination of the defence in some disgust. Talcott was saving up the burning of the cabin after the committal of the deed as a final trump, and it seemed to him that the mountaineer's spite would deprive it of efficacy.

He thought so more than ever when Trave Meredith rose to his feet, with his hand clamped to his afflicted shoulder, and faced the Court.

In a few pithy sentences Meredith reviewed the situation as defined by the prosecution, reminding the Court at the same time that his client stood at the bar self-arraigned, not to answer for a crime, but to explain an act of self-protection which he proposed, through his counsel, to establish before them not only as entirely justifiable, but as absolutely inevitable. He sketched rapidly over Deane Rutherford's career from boyhood to the present moment, proving for him, despite the violence of temper with which he was accredited, a straightforward, manly record, whose trend, from the beginning, had been upward. Waving Jim Trotter aside for the moment he put on the stand others who were willing and able to prove that the Rutherfords, so far from being feared, or disliked, for their hot-headedness had always been popular and respected. And that Deane's father in 'special had been so great a favorite that the young man himself was still known about his old neighborhood as "Sam Rutherford's boy."

Through Mr. Voss, he proved that Deane's career for the past ten years had been such as any man might be proud of, and that he was, as he stood, a credit alike to the community and the race. Against this he set that which he, himself, knew of Wolfe Ranke and the prevalent opinion, even among "sports," that the ways of the deceased had been those of neither righteousness nor peace.

Then he branched off to the superstition, handling it respectfully, as a thing which, while it lay outside of general comprehension and had as yet never been

subjected to verification, might well be considered one of the "things of heaven and earth" whose origin and nature were unkenned of our philosophy, but not on that account to be summarily dismissed. He did not pretend to understand or to explain, he declared, but only to assert—and he defied any to gainsay him—that belief in the venom of a "blue-gum's" bite had existed among the people of the South for more generations than a man could reckon. It might be a theory scientifically demonstratable, or it might be a belief based altogether on imagination, but the fact remained that the thing had incorporated itself with the thought of the people and must be accepted as a factor and allowed for, until time should test its value or worthlessness.

This belief had attached itself exclusively to people of African blood because no full-blooded white had ever been known to possess gums marked as Wolfe Ranke's had been marked, and as were marked the gums of many of the colored race scattered through the South. The prosecution had claimed for the dead man immunity from admixture of blood, in opposition to the general impression based on the race sign-manual. The defense held that popular instinct had been correct, and that in accrediting the deceased with a black drop they had spoken within the truth. In proof of this he would produce witnesses who would carry Ranke's family records a little further back into the past.

Then to the astonishment of the defendant, from whom this development had been kept hidden, the sheriff produced from an inner room three new wit-

nesses, a grim-visaged and tormented looking gentleman, a slender, graceful young woman, clad in a close fitting suit of dark blue cloth, and a withered old negress, bent nearly double, and looking, despite her respectable turban and neat white apron, as if she had stepped out of a mummy case.

Joyce was sworn first, and gave briefly an account of her own interest having been excited in this matter of the "blue-gum" superstition; and of how she had gone to Aunt Venus, seeking general information, and had unearthed in the quest a story which appeared to have bearing on the case now before the Court. This story Aunt Venus would tell them.

Then she gave place to the old woman, but stood close beside her, holding one of the withered black claws in her daintily gloved hand and bending down from time to time to encourage the witness to speak more distinctly. She did not glance toward Rutherford, although through her lashes she saw him plainly enough, nor did she look at her brother, who stood near her, lowering. She kept her lids lowered, and when forced to raise them looked straight at the judge or at Lawyer Meredith.

For Deane, he followed her every moment with his eyes, and when she spoke bent forward to catch each syllable, unwitting that his expression was such that those who ran might read. His heart was filled with a very passion of love and gratitude, for he divined that she was there to help him. And the Court, and the people around about, thrilled in sympathy, not understanding at all, but feeling that this outward drama concealed another, as the calyx

enfolds the bud. In their quickened interest they held themselves motionless, and hearkened as though their very salvation depended on the strength of their ears.

Aunt Venus told the story of the "blue-gum" owned by Joyce's grandfather in almost the same words she had used in narrating it to the young lady, bringing out the mule incident strong, and also the, more than suspected, biting of the two children. She added to her narrative the additional information that the white woman who had lived with Wolfe after his manumission had been called Melissa Brown, and that their little daughter had borne the same first name. Aunt Venus further stated that talking over the old times had re-awakened her own interest in them to such an extent that she had made inquiries among her own color in regard to what had become of the woman and her children after Wolfe's death, and her own subsequent flitting.

The system of intelligence among negroes passes belief, so thorough and comprehensive is it, and so manifold are their sources of information. Aunt Venus had learned without trouble that Melissa Brown, calling herself by the name assumed by the ex-slave, and passing for a respectable widow, had settled in Johnson County in Tennessee, and that her son, who had been marked in the mouth like his sire, had died while still a boy.

Fred Ruthven substantiated the old woman's story out of his grandfather's plantation records, and at command of the Court in especial read aloud that

statement regarding the "singular death of my white mule, Judy." The cross-examination by the prosecution only refreshed everybody's memory and brought to light additional facts, all of which went to establish a connection by lineal descent, between Wolfe Ranke, the blue-gummed dweller on Tuckahoe Mountain and Wolfe Judson, the blue-gummed manumitted slave of the Ruthvens. That Tom Ranke had been ignorant that the woman he had married had mixed blood was clearly proven by the fact that he had gone through a ceremony with her in regular form, which would not have been possible had the secret of her birth been known.

When these facts, one after another, were brought to light, the blacksmith, despite his position of responsibility, could not forbear from casting glances of open triumph in the direction of Terry Smoot, nor from muttering in the ear of Nat Clarke, who sat next him, "I *know'd* he were p'isenous from the fust."

CHAPTER XXI.

"GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY, DO YOUR DUTY."

AFTER a short but necessary recess the prosecution had another innings and Talcott fought with all the strength that was in him for a verdict of manslaughter. From the moment that the Court had become satisfied that Ranke's blood had been mixed, the lawyer felt that his chance for success was small. He would have to battle against prejudices of the strongest, in behalf of a thing which was, relatively, of little account in the eyes of the class largely represented in the jury.

Human life has precious little sanctity in the eyes of a primitive community where it is freely staked on almost any hazard Talcott knew well enough that a claim for punishment based on the bare fact of the killing would weigh not a feather with the jury. Deane frankly acknowledged the killing, and was in no whit disturbed by it, nor in truth was the community. If an impression was to be made it must be through arousing another and equally strong set of prejudices. If the life of a man's body was held in scant respect, the body itself was sufficiently regarded. In all cases possible it must be treated with reverential consideration, and above all, be granted decent and orderly interment. The

burning of Ranke's body the prosecution felt to be their sole remaining trump, and Talcott played it boldly, hoping almost against hope to turn therewith the final trick. The jury must be made to feel individual responsibility in the matter because of Ranke's isolation, and the fact that he had no one to stand by him and take his part for love's sake.

Meredith hearkened to the eloquence of the opposition with a twinkle in his eye and a kind of twitch about his mouth which made Talcott feel uneasy. A sudden sense of tilting against windmills oppressed him. What if he should be striking all these good blows in the wrong place?

In due season his wily adversary convinced him that this fatuity had been his. Meredith calmly informed the Court that his client's complicity with the affair ended with the killing, and that he would prove this by a couple of witnesses who had previously, and legitimately, been suspected of knowledge of the matter. Without more ado, therefore, he had Miriam Watts brought forward and sworn.

Popular interest, which had flattened out under the delay and diversion incident to the recess, now pulled itself together and bobbed up alertly. Curious glances were fastened on the witness, who seemed defiant and ill at ease, and necks were craned for her evidence.

By a system of thumb-screwing known to good criminal practice the following story was elicited: The woman's acquaintance with the deceased dated back to his settlement on the mountain and had been, relatively, familiar, since she had, from time

to time, been employed by the "blue-gum" to attend to certain household matters for him, and also to make and mend. Her cabin was a short two miles from his, but around the shoulder of the mountain, and therefore out of even "smoke-sight." On one or two occasions, when she had visited the clearing on business, Miriam had surprised Ranke counting money. Large sums it had seemed to her, and always in specie, silver and gold. He had kept it in a canvass shot-bag, but in what place of concealment she, of course, could only conjecture.

After his death, when the increase of her own poverty by the loss of her husband made money appear to her the supreme good, the thought of Ranke's bag of dollars kept coming to her. It seemed a sinful waste for good money to be burned when there were widows and children in the world who needed it. Then the idea formulated that the coin might have been hidden somewhere about the premises outside of the cabin, and that, as Ranke appeared to have no kindred, the treasure would justly become the heritage of the finder. She had pondered the matter a long time and finally set herself to search for the money. For this purpose she went to the clearing many times, generally choosing the hours before night-fall, and wearing an old hat and coat of her husband's, more, however, for convenience than disguise. In twilight she might readily be mistaken for a man, particularly when debris or bushes partially concealed the fall of her scanty dark skirts. She had searched exhaustively, even to digging among the ashes with

an old spade she had found in the out-house. The idea of being mistaken for a "ha'rnt" had never crossed her mind until one evening, just on the edge of dark, when she had been grubbing among the ruins, Jim Trotter had come up the path from the ford, preceded by his little crop-eared dog. The dog knew her. He was an egg-sucking little varmint, and not three days before she had burned his jaws properly for him with a scalding hot egg, in requital for unwarranted interference with her speckled top-knot, who persisted in laying under the ash-hopper, in clear temptation of predatory canines. The dog, warned of memory, was terrified at sight of her, and had tucked tail and fled away howling.

Jim, likewise, had been "skeer'd mighty nigh to death," mistaking her for a "ha'rnt." He had shrunk together and glared at her, like a plumb dazzled luny fool, and when she, not comprehending the situation, had advanced, with intent to make plausible explanation of her presence, he had thrown out his hands, as if to ward her off, and yelled aloud in a panic, "God A'mighty! It's Ranke! Come to me arter his money!" And then he had heeled it out of the clearing like a clipper, and when she, filled with laughter at his terror, got to the old fence to look after him, he was jumping down the mountain side, in the bushes and out, like a hunted rabbit.

At first she had forborne to disabuse Trotter's mind out of frolic, and for the bliss of a malicious enjoyment at his expense. For the same reason she had played "ha'rnt" more than once to others, and

had even gone so far as to make a flare in the clearing one night for the benefit of the hunters across the ravine. She was not afraid of "ha'rnts" herself.

Later, when all her own efforts to discover the dead man's hoard proved abortive, she had got studying about those words of Jim's, and commenced to put two and two together, remembering that Jim's prosperity dated to about the time of the "blue-gum's" death. It had taken her a long time to think the matter into shape, but finally she had arrived at the conclusion that if anybody knew about Ranke's death and, above all, about Ranke's money, it must be Jim Trotter.

She had not mentioned her suspicion, being neighborly with the Trotters, and, as she admitted, in all probability never would have done so, but Trotter's wife had insulted her, in the fall, in a most gratuitous fashion. So that "to pay Lelia out for her insurance" she had let this malignant cat out of the bag.

The woman appeared to feel no shame for the part she had played, and would have entered into a detailed account of the soap-kettle outrage, supplemented by a fierce tirade against her unaccommodating neighbor, but the Court cut her short without ceremony, and she was requested to give place with a curtness which filled her with anger which vented itself in stormy mutterings, to which no human paid the faintest heed.

The prosecution objected to Jim Trotter's being put on the stand on various flimsy pretexts, which

the judge, whose curiosity was excited, promptly set aside, with a testy shrug of his corpulent shoulders.

When the attorney for the defence got hold of him, Jim doubled and twisted like a fox in a thicket, but Meredith was used to that sort of behavior and cleverly met him at every turn. At last he was cornered and forced by a hard and comprehensive system of drilling, which enabled the lawyer to drag to light facts by the same process that a woodpecker employs to pull worms from under the bark, to implicate himself in the affair to a considerable extent.

Divested of circumlocution and evasion the Court learned that on the day of Ranke's death, late in the afternoon, almost on the edge of dark, Trotter had gone to the clearing for the purpose of having a talk with the "blue-gum." He was in considerable trouble about a mortgage on his land which was threatening foreclosure, and in a bad stress for money. He knew that Ranke was on the look-out for a horse and thought that if he could persuade his neighbor to invest in a certain bay filly he possessed, he might stave off his own trouble. He knew also that Ranke cast covetous eyes on Deane Rutherford's red mare, but was convinced that the money had not yet been coined which would buy that beauty from her owner. Indeed, Deane had told him so the night before when a guest in his—Trotter's—house.

The storm had cleared, to a great extent, before he set out for the clearing, only holding on with an occasional spit of snow, or sleet, fiercely delivered.

The ground was covered with icy particles, and frozen hard, like iron; a man's step made no more impression on it than if he had been walking over stone. He expected to find Ranke alone, because Rutherford, who had proposed to stop by and bid farewell to the "blue-gum," only intended to remain at the clearing half an hour. There were no foot-prints about the place, but a light smoke curled up from the chimney. The dogs rushed out at him, but were easily placated and, receiving no answer to his knock, he had lifted the latch and entered.

To his surprise the place was all put about, the chairs upset, lightwood knots scattered over the hearth, and an empty barrel lying on its side in the middle of the floor with playing cards and money around it. He glanced about bewildered and his eyes encountered Ranke lying on his bed with his face to the wall. He called to him, but received no answer, and something in the look of the figure and the atmosphere of the place made him all at once acutely conscious that the "blue-gum" was not asleep. He piled lightwood on the dying fire and made a great blaze before stepping across to the bed. A very brief examination proved to him that Ranke was stone-dead, but how long this had been the case he, of course, had no means of determining. The body was rigid and icy, the eyes were half closed and the lips were a trifle drawn back from the teeth, as though in a snarl. The countenance was hideous, and he was glad enough to turn away from it, after having satisfied himself that the "blue-gum" had come to his death by violence. To

that fact the appearance of the room bore testimony as plainly as did the contusion on the dead man's temples. There had been card-playing between Ranke and one or more others, and a quarrel which had resulted in this. He did not connect Deane with the deed, then or afterward. His idea was that some of the roughs the "blue-gum" was known to consort with down in the valley had been up paying him a visit. He had met an ugly, snub-nosed fellow at the clearing once or twice himself.

What puzzled him was that the money should have been left. He gathered it all together, hunting in every hole and cranny that none should escape, and counted it. In silver, notes, and gold there were several hundred dollars, more money than he had ever seen at one time in his whole life. To a poor man it was a fortune—to a man in trouble a deliverance. He counted it over and over, squatting down by the hearth to get the benefit of the firelight, and forgetful of the dead owner of it, stretched still unburied on his bed. He smoothed the notes through his fingers, and turned the glittering gold pieces in his palm. The sheen of it got into his eyes and blinded them; into his heart and set it beating with strange, muffled strokes; into his brain and generated hideous thoughts and temptations.

Whose gold was this, now that Ranke was dead? It might be anybody's—it might be *his!* Who would know? That mortgage—his own stress—and this unowned money here in his hands! It seemed like——

At this point in his forced confession the man broke down utterly and dropped his head on his folded arms, all broken up and trembling.

They let him alone, even when, undismissed, he stepped down from the witness stand and made his way out of the court-room. The finale could be figured out without his help. The temptation had proved too strong for him and he had succumbed. Later had come remembrance of the other man, or men, who, their panics over, might return and dispute with him the ill-gotten gains. What more easy than to ignite the bed-clothes, to pour on the floor and the scattered lightwood the contents of lamp and oil-can. With the cabin burned who could say that the money had not been burned also?

Meredith's summing up of the case was felt to be a masterly effort. He rose to his feet and leaning slightly against the bar with his shoulder clasped in his hand, he went over for them in his strange, penetrating, flexible accents, the real story of that past tragedy. He showed them the boy, so full of hope and fellowship, going about among his old friends to give and take a hand-clasp and a "God speed" before he went out into the world to live his life according to the strength that had been given him. He showed them that meeting in the clearing and the cordiality of the wily host bent on wresting by fair or foul means from the guest the thing which he loved. He showed them the storm which had delayed Deane's departure, the quiet room where the pair had eaten together, the great fire

glowing on the hearthstone and casting a warm light over the rude preparations for a "friendly game." He showed them the wily gambler, blackleg and cheat, holding back, manipulating the cards and plying his unsuspecting guest with the liquor which was to unseat perception and blind judgment. He showed how Deane had been led on and on, cunningly, until that last stake had been made, played and lost.

Then, knowing how his audience could appreciate a man's love for his horse, he showed them the boy's despair when he realized that his horse, his beautiful red mare, was no longer his, but another man's. Then had come wild offers of treble the creature's value, wild pleadings for at least a chance to win the mare back, and scoffs on the part of the victor. Then the fight, and the hideous attempt of the enraged "blue-gum" to bury his teeth in his opponent's flesh.

The lawyer's wonderfully magnetic voice changed with every emotion, giving with its curious inflections tones and half-tones of feeling, as the brush of a painter will give shadings and gradation of color. The listeners pulsed and swayed with him, like an instrument cunningly played by the hand of a master. They saw that which he intended them to see, even to the stunned bewilderment with which the boy, changed in a few short hours into a man, had gone out from the death chamber, which so nearly had been his own, into the storm with never a thought for the spoils which a human jackal was to come presently and gather up.

When the last words had been spoken there fell silence in the court for a brief space. Then the judge gathered himself together and delivered his charge to the jury in few words.

"Gentlemen of the jury, do your duty."

That was all.

Then the jury trooped out in a body, and almost before the door of the jury-room had comfortably closed upon the heels of the final talesman, wheeled about and trooped in again. The foreman, no less a person than Toby Blake, the Tuckahoe blacksmith, handed a folded paper to the sheriff, who stepped forward, and amid an electric silence, read aloud the verdict.

It was:

JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RUBY HEART.

Then, and not until then, did Joyce turn her face toward Rutherford, looking full at him with a soft glow in her beautiful eyes and the slow dawning of a smile about her lips, as though in the joy of his exculpation she claimed a right to participate.

Her brother, moved for the nonce out of his prejudices and carried off his feet as it were by the excitement which thrilled through the court, squared himself around so as to shield her from observation. And Joyce, taking advantage of the shelter thus afforded, and obedient to the impulse that was in her, leaned forward from the place where she stood and opened her little hand so that Deane might see, resting on the fair, white flesh of her palm, a ruby heart. Then, when she could see by his expression that the message had flashed rightly to its appointed place, she closed her fingers over the heart again, and suffered her brother to take her away and put her into the carriage which was waiting to convey her back to Manitoba, in company with the venerable dame who that day had done them all such yeoman service.

The people could not make enough of Deane and

surrounded him on all sides, shaking hands, asking questions, pouring in congratulations, and buzzing about him with kindliness and such a cyclone of words that he was like to go distracted.

Outside, a party of young fellows, for a frolic, had crowned the red mare with flowers, to her no small discomfort, and were leading her about the court green by a long white ribbon slipped through the ring of her halter. She pricked up her pretty red ears when she heard Deane's step, and jerked herself free that she might go to him and rub her head against his shoulder with the soft whinnying call which meant so much to them both. Then the crowd, irrepressible as a crowd always is, caught the beauty of the sentiment which bound man and horse together, and by a common impulse took off their hats and cheered Deane Rutherford and his red mare to the echo.

Deane bared his head and thanked them all, his old-time friends and associates, for the justice they had done him. And, as soon as he could manage it without offence, took himself and his horse away, riding out from among the people, as was the instinct of his mountain rearing, to find some silent leafy place where he could realize it all and straighten things out with his own soul.

But in the village they had a jollification at the Buck-horn Tavern, with Lawyer Meredith in the chair, and the attorney for the prosecution beside him, and drank everybody's health in native apple-jack that seemed to fairly embody the moon-beams which had presided over its distilling. And the

only lack that was felt was the one which Toby Blake put into words when he said:

"Fellows, this here jubilation would e'en-er-bout tetch the top notch if so be we-all had Sam Rutherford an' the 'ole lady' to git it into music for us."

CHAPTER XXIII.

JOYCE'S MIND IS MADE UP.

DRIVING homeward through the gathering twilight Joyce was content. She leaned back in her corner and gave herself up to happiness and reverie, utterly indifferent to the badness of the road in places, or the fact that old Aunt Venus, with the readily recurrent somnolence of age, indulged at intervals in most audible napping. Aunt Venus had been a trump card, and in all probability had won the game for them, therefore she was entitled to slumber if so inclined, even when "settin' up in de white-folks' car'age" in company with her young lady.

Joyce was fully conscious that her love affair had by no means reached its ultimate. That she would be obliged to endure insinuations, strictures and many remonstrances. That Uncle Charlie would come and talk to her, reinforced by his wife and his three daughters. That the other uncles and aunts would come also, and that all such as were at too great distance from Manitoba to spare time from business for personal interviews, or who were afraid of infection from scarlet fever, would write, promptly and at great length. The clan Ruthven, in all probability, would arraign her for public and private judgment, and singly and collectively, would

coax, persuade and reprobate her. Joyce laughed to herself to think how she would be voted an apostate from family precedent and traditions by kinsfolks whom she scarcely knew, and whose lives intersected hers at the one point of a common ancestry, and there alone.

Joyce cared for it all not the value of a shankless button. It would be disagreeable, but it would, after all, be transient, and she was too familiar with her own sturdiness of grain to admit for an instant any possibility of influence. She was sorry that her brother would not be satisfied, at first, with her choice; but nobody else mattered. Why should they? It was *her* happiness or misery which would be involved, not theirs.

When, on the previous Monday morning, Fred had announced his intention of riding over to Tuckahoe Court-House to be present at the trial she had longed feverishly to go with him; but could frame no decent or plausible excuse. It had seemed hard and cruel to be obliged by conventionality to stay behind when her heart was strained and her soul ravening to see with her own eyes and hear with her own ears. Then a way had suddenly been opened. Fred, sitting on the porch of the Buckhorn Tavern, had overheard a bit of conversation which had suggested coincidences to his mind, and aroused a train of thought which had ultimated in an interview with Lawyer Meredith. The upshot of which had been that Fred, in company with Mr. Sinclair, junior counsel for the defense, had been despatched back to Manitoba in hot haste for the

Ruthven plantation records and, if possible, Joyce herself and Aunt Venus.

Joyce had gone gladly, like a bird to its nest, and now that, for her, all things were straightened out, she leaned back in her corner and watched the moonlight come softly and increase until it filled the whole earth with a mellow radiance in harmony with the beauty of her imaginings.

And outside, her brother, following the carriage on horseback, went over the situation likewise, and decided that the better part of wisdom, as well as of affection, would be to accept with as little ado as possible that which he was powerless to alter. He loved his sister tenderly, and was acquainted with her nature. Joyce was a strong-mouthed filly, he admitted, and when she jerked her head free and took the bit between her teeth there was nothing for it but to stand clear and let her have the road. She would take it anyhow.

Still, impelled by a sense of family responsibility, he made one feeble venture, despite his inward conviction of its futility. After he had helped his sister out of the carriage at the Manitoba gate, and directed the coachman to drive Aunt Venus to her cabin, Fred put his hands on Joyce's shoulders and faced her about in the moonlight so that he could look into her eyes.

"There is no use in my saying anything, I suppose, Joyce," he observed ruefully.

And Joyce smiled up at him none the less tenderly for the resolution of her face as she made answer.

"Not the least in the world, brother. My mind is made up."

After that there was nothing more to be said, for that time, at least. So the brother and sister kissed each other and proceeded into the house, where they found supper waiting and Louise in a ferment of curiosity to know how the trial had ended.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

For many hours after the trial Rutherford was detained at the court-house by Lawyer Meredith and the other men, for the question arose as to whether it would be worth while for the grand jury to indict Jim Trotter for arson and theft. The matter was openly discussed on the tavern porch, for in backwoods communities there is no rigidity of official etiquette, and any man who had an opinion on the subject freely ventilated the same. The fact that Trotter had already had three months in jail, coupled with the other facts that a log cabin built by a man's own hands from timber cut on the ground is not a valuable structure, and that the money stolen in reality appeared to belong to nobody, since all that had not been won from Deane at cards had been similarly come by, were felt by the easy-going community to be extenuating circumstances. Lawyer Meredith summed up the popular estimate of the case in a single remark.

"It was a deuced unhandsome thing to do all around," he declared, tilting his chair back against the houseside. "And of course he's committed an offence which makes him liable to the penitentiary,

and anybody who feels a call to haul the matter before the grand jury can have Trotter indicted. But there seems to be nobody with any personal interest in the affair, no heirs or kindred, and the prosecution will cost the State a good deal more than Ranke's land and cabin both are worth, so it seems hardly worth while to stir the matter. That money was pretty much everybody's I suppose, being won over cards, and cheated for besides most likely. Trotter's spent it too, long ago, and what little property he owns himself his family can hold as homestead. Jim's done a dirty trick and his neighbors know it, and most probably will make him sweat for it, so I reckon the law can afford to hold off and leave punishment to popular opinion."

That which is everybody's business is nobody's business, so in tolerant Southern fashion the matter was allowed to lapse, particularly as Deane Rutherford, when approached, refused to have anything to do with an indictment and even spoke strongly against it.

"No; I won't appear against Trotter," he declared. "He isn't a regular thief, and that one temptation was sudden and overwhelming. We've all lived neighbors with Trotter and been friendly, so what's the use of rubbing the shame into his family. Give the fellow a chance to pull up, for the sake of his wife and children. My temper blazed the way for him anyhow. If I hadn't fought with Ranke and killed him Trotter couldn't have scooped

up the money and burned the cabin. Besides, having to stand up and own to doing a low meanness like that, and show up for a blackguard and thief for all time, is about punishment enough for any man who isn't a brute. Trotter is going to have a rough time for a good many years to come, or I know nothing of human nature in Tuckahoe neighborhood."

The man himself appeared to have the same idea. After leaving the court-room he mounted his horse and went straight home, riding hard, seeking to outstrip the news of his disgrace. His wife was surprised to see him back so soon, and full of interest and inquiries about the trial. He satisfied her as well as he could without betraying his own secret, and sat among them all, with the youngest baby on his knee, feeling strange and alien from himself and from them. Once when his wife paused near him, asking some question, he looked up at her wistfully, and put out his hand and touched hers. After awhile he rose, and saying something about stepping over to the saw-mill to see how things were getting on, took his gun from the hooks above the door and went out. His wife watched him slouching across the yard and the little corn-field, with the gun on his shoulder, and noticed how heavily he walked and that as he crossed the rail fence at the farther side of the lot he paused and turned to look back at his home. She thought he might be ailing, and called to her eldest daughter to toast the coffee extra well and have it hot and strong for supper;

her "Pappy looked tired an' would be proud o' his coffee, an' feel 'freshed up by it."

Trotter did not return that evening, nor the next day, and when the men at the saw-mill were interviewed they had seen nothing of him. The news of the scene in the court-room had come up to them by that time; but none as yet had summoned up courage to tell the missing man's wife. Toby Blake's wife had gone over to the Trotters purposely to do it, thinking that she might soften the blow somewhat to her old friend, but after a short visit she returned to the smithy openly announcing herself inadequate to the task. When it was known through the neighborhood that Jim was missing there was but one opinion shared by all alike, and even by Jim's own sore and much humiliated sons. It was felt that Jim had "skipped the county," and so no effort was made to penetrate the secret of his disappearance.

It was Miriam Watts who brought to light the real truth of the matter. On the third day after Jim's disappearance she hurried across the yard at Trueheart's store and thrust herself in among the men there congregated with a pale, scared countenance, and a tale in her mouth that turned the stoutest of them sick and shivery. She had been in the woods after bark for dye making, she affirmed, and had taken the direction of Ranke's clearing because she wanted walnut bark especially and the woods about the clearing abounded in walnut timber.

While she chopped she noticed the buzzards passing, one after another, until she had counted more than a dozen, all flying low and in one direction. Somebody had lost a hog or a yearling thereabout, she thought, and having a few head of stock at large in the woods herself, she had shouldered her ax and followed the hideous convoy, minded to satisfy her mind, if possible, as to who might be the loser.

When she got to the clearing, she had found the body of a man, lying face downward amid the ruins of the burned cabin, with his gun beside him. The remains were in a pitiable condition, but she knew the dead man for Jim Trotter, and felt sure that remorse and shame for his unhappy deed had carried the wretched man to the scene of its enactment, there to terminate his own existence.

The woman had been terrified and sickened, but had pulled together courage and humanity enough to protect the body with rails and brush before coming away to summon the neighbors together to do that which was needful. And the men, with the instinctive delicacy which develops sometimes from close contact with nature in God's solitudes, made things as decent and seemly as might be before they took the dead man to his home.

They forbore also from many words about the event, either then or afterward, for Trotter's family were well liked in the district and the people had no wish to hurt them more than might be needful.

So they bared their heads quietly and folded their lips together, for the mystery of death, like a mantle with borders, enfolds alike those accounted righteous and those held of the community of sinners, and covers all from criticism and overt unkind judgment.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

On the afternoon of the third day following the trial Rutherford, having straightened out matters to his satisfaction at the Winock factory, saddled his red mare and took the road to Manitoba. It was a day such as the Southland gives us, soft and slumbrous, with a sky of sapphire and an atmosphere quick with the breath of honeysuckle and roses. The trees, in full leafage, met overhead, making an archway for the old plantation road which stretched out like a dusk brown ribbon with a broidery on either edge of dainty green and colors, where grass and rock-ferns grew beside the wall, and Indian pinks and Columbines made braveries of crimson and scarlet and yellow.

Deane rode in happiness and peace, for to his love he was going as a man assured. And wherefore not? Had she not stood up for him in open day, and afterward shown him that she knew that she held his heart in her hand? And holding it so, had she not closed her white fingers over it, one by one, as over a valued treasure? What more could man desire? Only that to which the red mare was

bearing him, stepping daintily, despite her years, and arching her handsome neck and tossing her red front like a filly.

Joyce was in the beautiful old hall when he came, and awaited him there, standing amid the relics of a past made suggestive and satisfying by wealth and culture. She watched the door for her lover's coming with no thought of the race grown old in its own place.

But Deane, as he entered the beautiful hall with its lofty ceiling of hand-wrought wood, its wainscoted walls set close with family portraits and its century-old plenishings, placed against it, involuntarily, in his own mind, a tiny smoke-dried cabin among the hills, filled with the homely things which surround a people in their beginnings. Being the man he was, the contrast amused and stimulated him—from that he, by sheer manhood, had reached *this*. With a smile on his lips, and a masterful joy in his heart, he advanced to meet the woman coming to him in the center of the place.

Joyce said no words, only looked up at him with her soul in her eyes and, meeting the answer which burned in his, let him fold his arms about her and draw her close with the long, lingering kisses which love knows, and the whispered words of exquisite tenderness.

And upon it all the ancestors, perforce, looked down, with mirth or gloom as the artists had elected to represent them. And Fred, beholding the red mare fastened beside the gate, whistled

under his breath and then sighed, but smiled again when his wife drew near and slipped her hand in his.

For who shall dictate or control while youth is youth, and "love is still the lord of all."

THE END.

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